

## CHAPTER IV

### THE STRONG WAY WITH MUTINY

BUT the common man in Britain was not being the British bulldog of General Gerson's hopes. He was declining to be a bulldog altogether. He was remaining a profoundly sceptical human being, with the most disconcerting modern tendencies. And much too large a part of his combative energy was directed, not against the appointed enemy, but against the one commanding spirit which could still lead him to victory.

The Decree of Public Safety was now the law of the land. It might not be strictly constitutional, but the dictatorship had superseded constitutionalism. Yet everywhere it was being disputed. The national apathy was giving place to a resistance as bold as it was dogged. North, east, and west there were protests, remonstrances, overt obstruction. The recalcitrant workers found lawyers to denounce the Lord Paramount's authority, funds to organize resistance. Half the magistrates in the country were recusant and had to be superseded by military courts. Never had the breach between the popular mind and the imperial will of the directive and possessing classes been so open and so uncompromising. It was

astounding to find how superficial loyalty to the Empire had always been.

The distress of the Lord Paramount at these tensions was extreme. "My English," he said. "My English. My English have been misled." He would stand with a sheaf of reports from the mobilization department in his hand repeating, "I did not count on this."

It needed all the most penetrating reminders of which Gerson was capable to subdue that heroically tender heart to the stern work of repression. And yet, just because the Lord Paramount had stood aside and effaced himself in that matter of the hospitals he was misjudged, and his repressive measures were understood to be the natural expression of a fierce and arrogant disposition. The caricaturists gave him glaring and projecting eyes and a terrible row of teeth. They made his hands—and really they were quite shapely hands—into the likeness of gesticulating claws. That was a particularly cruel attack. "I must be strong," he repeated to himself, "and later they will understand."

But it is hard for a patriot to be stark and strong with his own misguided people. Riots had to be dispersed with bayonets and rifle-fire in the south of Wales, in Lancashire and the Midlands. There was savage street fighting in Glasgow. The tale of these domestic casualties lengthened. The killed were presently to be counted by the hundred. "Nip the trouble in the bud," said Gerson. "Arrest the agitators and shoot a few of them, if

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you don't like firing on crowds. Over half the country now time is being lost and the drafts delayed."

So those grim sedition clauses which had looked so calmly heroic on paper were put into operation. The military authorities arrested vigorously. A few old hands were caught in the net but even before the courts martial were held it was apparent to the Lord Paramount that for the most part they were dealing with excitable youths and youngish men. Most of these younger agitators would have been treated very indulgently indeed if they had been university students. But Gerson insisted upon the need of a mental shock for the whole country. "Shoot now," he said, "and you may forgive later. War is war."

"Shoot now," said Gerson, "and the rest will come in for training, good as gold. Stop the rot. And let 'em say what they like about you."

The Lord Paramount could feel how tenderly and completely that faithful secretary of his could read the intimations of his saddened and yet resolute profile. "Yes," he admitted, "we must shoot—though the bullet tears us on its way."

The order went forth.

There was a storm of remonstrances, threats, and passionate pleas for pity. That was to have been expected. Much was fended off from direct impact upon the Lord Paramount, but he knew the protest was there. It found an echo in his own too human heart. "The will of a great people," he said, "must override these little indi-

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vidual stories. There is this boy Carrol from Bristol they are asking me to reprieve! There seems to be a special fuss about him. A sort of boy scholar of promise—yes. But read the poison of those speeches he made! He struck an officer. . . .”

“*Shall Carrol die?*” asked an outbreak of placards along Whitehall that no one could account for. That hardened the Lord Protector’s mouth; he must show he would not be bullied, and in stern response to that untimely challenge young Carrol and five and thirty associates died at dawn.

There was a hideous popular clamour at this unavoidable act of war. The Lord Paramount’s secretarial organization was far too new and scanty to protect him adequately from the clamour of this indignation and, it may be, something in himself acted as an all too ready receiver for these messages of antagonism. Abruptly out of the void into which he was wont to vanish appeared Sir Bussy the unquenchable. He was now almost full size again and confident and abrupt in his pre-war style.

“This shooting of boys!” he said. “This killing of honest and straightforward people who don’t agree with you! Why, damn it! we might be in Italy! It’s a century out of date. Why did you ever let this war get loose?”

The Lord Paramount stood defensively mute, and it was Gerson who took the words out of his mouth and answered Sir Bussy. “Have you never

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even heard of discipline? Have you never heard of the needs of war? I tell you we are at war."

"But why are we at war?" cried Sir Bussy.  
"Why the devil are we at war?"

"What the devil are fleets and armies for if we are never to use them? What other ways are there for settling national differences? What's a flag for if you're never going to wave it? I tell you, it's not only street-corner boys and Bolshie agitators who are going against the wall. This Empire of ours is fighting for its life. It calls on every man. And you know as well as I know, Sir Bussy, what it needs to win. . . . And at what a pace the stuff is coming in!" . . .

Gerson had turned to the Lord Paramount, and Sir Bussy, it seemed, was no longer present.

"Peace time you may be as soft as you like—delay and humbug have always been the rule for home politics, naturally—but you can't play about with war and foreign policy. For things of that order you need a heart of steel."

"A heart of steel," echoed the Lord Paramount.

"Gas L and a heart of steel."

"We go through with it, *mon général*," said the Lord Paramount. "Trust me."

"Time we started going through with it. . . ."

What was far more distressing to the Lord Paramount than any other resistances or remonstrances over this business of internal discipline was the emergence from nothingness of a certain old lady, old Mrs. Carrol. Against addresses, pro-

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tests, demonstrations, threats of murder, and the like, the Lord Paramount could be the strongest of strong men, could show a face of steely disregard. But old Mrs. Carrol was different. Her attack was different in its nature. She did not threaten, she did not abuse. Carrol, it seemed, had been an only son. She wanted him alive again.

She came like a sudden thought into his presence. She was exactly like an old woman lodge keeper at Samphore Park, near Mr. Parham's early home. That old woman, whose name was long since forgotten, had had an only son also, three or four years older than the juvenile Parham, and he had worked in the garden of Mr. Parham's father. Always he had been known as Freddy. He had been a very friendly, likeable boy, and the two youngsters had been great friends and allies. He read books and told stories, and once he had confided a dreadful secret to his companion. He was half minded to be a socialist, he was, and he didn't believe not more'n half the Bible was true. They had had an argument, a quarrel, for it was young Parham's first meeting with sedition, and duty and discipline were in his blood. But of course it was impossible there could be any identity between this long-forgotten rustic and young Carrol. By now he would be old enough to be young Carrol's father.

It was a little difficult to trace how this old lady got at the Lord Paramount. She seemed to have great penetrating power. His staff ought perhaps

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to have fended her off. But the same slight distrust of those about him, that sense of the risk of "envelopment," which made the Lord Paramount desire to be as "accessible" as possible to the generality, left just the sort of opening through which a persistent old woman of that kind might come. At any rate, there she was, obliterating all the rest of the case, very shabby and with a careworn face and a habit of twisting one hand round inside the other as she spoke, extraordinarily reminiscent of Freddy's mother.

"When people go to war and get boys shot and the like, they don't think a bit what it means to them they belongs to, their mothers and such, what have given their best years to their upbringing.

"He was a good boy," she insisted, "and you had him shot. He was a good *skilful* boy."

She produced a handful of paper scraps from nowhere and held them out, quivering, to the Lord Paramount. "Here's some of the little things he drew before he went into the works. Why, I've seen things by royalties not half so good as these! He didn't ought to have been shot, clever as he was. Isn't there anything to be done about it?"

"And when he got older he had a meccano set, and he made a railway signal with lights that went on and off, and the model of a windmill that went round when you blew it. No wonder he was welcome in the works. I'd have brought them here for you to see if I'd thought they would have weighed with you. You'd have marvelled. And now he won't never make anything more with his

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hands, and those busy little brains of his are still as stone."

There is no record that Alexander or Cæsar or Napoleon was haunted by an old woman who kept on twisting her hands about as though she were trying to wring the blood out of a deed that was done, and who sought to temper her deadly persistence by a pose of imploration. Almost she cringed.

"You don't understand, my good woman," said the Lord Paramount. "He put his brains to a bad use. He was a mutineer. He was a rebel."

The old lady would have none of that. "Artie wasn't ever a rebel. Don't I know it? Why, when he was little I was frightened at his goodness, always so willing, he was, and so helpful. I've thought time after time, for all his health and spirits, 'That boy must be ailing,' so good he was to me. . . .

"And now you've shot him. Can't anything else be done about it still? Can't something be done instead?"

"This crucifies me," he said to Mrs. Pinchot. "This crucifies me."

That made him feel a little better for a time, but not altogether better. "All things," he said "I must suffer in my task," and still was not completely convinced. He descended from his cross. He tried to be angry. "Damn old Mrs. Carroll! Can no one make that old woman understand that *war is war*? This is no place for her. She must



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be stopped from coming here.”

But she continued to come, nevertheless; though her coming had less and less the quality of a concrete presence and more and more of the vague indefinable besetting distressfulness of a deteriorating dream.