

## CHAPTER II

## KRIEG ! KRIEG !

HE passed the baths and then the great avenue took him, leading him past the trout farm, from where, looking back, he could see Serajevo lying, a strew of houses in the lap of the hills. No picture of a distant town could be fairer than that, as even still it lies, Serajevo, the umbilical centre of history, the peaceful spot from which arose that which has left the world half-ruined.

To be young, to be free, to be without a single care in the world, even the care of luggage, what can be better than that ?

It was owing to a Bosnian painter in Paris, Mitrovik, that Jean had determined on this trip, surely a lucky one.

Mitrovik had said, " You will see life real and uncooked down there where the gipsies are, and the magpies and the snow mountains that tourists don't go to climb. Everywhere else in Europe is smudged over and stale with use. But over there is full of old ghosts of the Turks, and the echoes of old wars still rumble about the hills ; it is tragic and the people are strange, but all the same you will find there ideas and get out of this infernal rut they call Paris."

Well, certainly Mitrovik had spoken true. Here, beyond the Bavarian Alps, it was as though a barrier had been passed, beyond which the old civilisation could not follow, where over all these lands, for ages, the great grey bodied carrion crow had watched

and the eagle of the mountains cast its shadow. They had seen the Turkish waves sweeping towards Vienna and swept back, leaving the once submerged country with nothing to show of the East save the old Turkish graveyards and the minarets above the half-deserted mosques; they had seen small wars and great wars, and the fall of castles, and they had feasted on many a battlefield of this war-burnt-out country that seemed to-day under the cloudless sky to have found Peace at last, and eternal.

Yes, Mitrovik was right.

This land of the carrion crow and the magpie and the eagle was unlike any other land, and Jean in the silence of midday, taking his seat on a hillside amidst a quiet only broken by the murmur of the wild bee and the wind in the bushes, and opening the parcel of food he had brought with him from the hotel, fell, as he ate, to contemplate this Restaurant of the Four Seasons whose roof was the sky, whose walls the steadfast hills. He had taken, not the road through the great gorge, but a path through the hills.

He reckoned to sleep at a village marked down on his map. Should he not reach it or should he miss it there were always peasants' houses, or failing that in this steadfast blue weather, the open air.

"You need not bother," Mitrovik had said. "You will be in a land where every stranger is a guest, a land where there are bandits, it is true, but no robbers, except at the hotels. A man on foot is safe there, for the man on foot is reckoned poor. Language? There you will only want the words that stand for bread, wine and shelter. I will teach them to you."

Below and to the right of where Jean had taken his seat the hillside was sprinkled with what looked

like a crop of stone mushrooms. A graveyard far from town or church or village, such as you often find in the Bosnian hills.

Turkish tombstones.

He could tell at once the men's from the women's, for the men's each wore a turban of stone. One of these latter had on it the figure of a sword cut in the stone. A Turkish officer of the time of—when? By it stood the stone of a woman whose yashmak now was earth; and beyond, that of a man of some importance judging from its size, but the wind and the weather of the years had left it now plain—but just as useful for the carrion crow to rest on.

The bees murmured about the graves, and the wind from the hills lifted the sorrel and bent the grass.

Jean on his elbow and looking downwards fell into a reverie, half-pleasurable, half-sad. It is strange how complacently one contemplates the death of others—the mirror reflecting ones own fate!

Here were the Turks. Men, maybe, of the armies of Sultan Mohammed II., or from the days of Ali Tebelen, and their women folk; and they knew that road down below where the Turkish armies had marched and where the Austrian drums had sounded, the road that War had built, without doubt, for War to use—now desolate, trodden only by the peasant leading his horse laden with wood or corn for the market of Tilova or Tarchin.

Krieg! Krieg!

The cry of a bird from the blue caused him to raise his eyes towards a dot swimming in the azure, an eagle making for its eyrie in the crags beyond Kreshevo.

What might not one paint if one could only see

what these rocks had seen of the fierceness and beauty of War and Love?

He lay for a moment, his hands across his eyes, listening to the wind and the bees, and as he lay his mind drifted to Paris, to the galleries of the Louvre, the pictures of Delacroix. The Distribution of the Eagles.

Tap, tap!

The sound of a drum!

He was in the avenue near Serajevo, the girl and the old soldier stood before him.

"And will you let me paint your picture?"

"You must pay me for that," said the girl.

His pockets were full of money, gold Fredrichs, and he took a handful out, but the girl like a bird tilted her head to one side looking at the gold—no, she did not want gold.

What then did she want?

Ah! he knew.

The old soldier had vanished. She was sitting beside him on the fallen tree, his arm was around her and she was half-laughing, half-resisting.

"No, not here—some one will see."

"But there is no one."

She rose and ran away and he was chasing her, and she led him right into the Hotel de L'Europe. Stein was there and they all sat down at the table under the window—she was gone and there only remained Stein, and he was saying, "At Ragusa—I will see you at Ragusa—Ragusa—"

Then there was only the wind on the hill and the sun, and a magpie that fluttered off, and the remains of the paper in which his food had been wrapped blowing here and there amidst the Turkish graves.

Jean sat up.

That girl! He had not thought of her like this before. He had seen her only as an artist sees, not as a man.

What had brought her up like that?

Ask of the subliminal mind, that maker of dreams.

It would seem that the man had been observing her all the while the artist had been sketching her.

To every man his trade. To a surgeon the most beautiful woman in the world is secondary to her ailment, to an artist the nude model has no appeal except the artistic.

Krieg! Krieg!

Another black dot was sailing towards the hills beyond Kreshevo, the mate, perhaps, of the first.

Yes, the subliminal mind and the thought of war and the drums of the Austrians evoking the figure of the old soldier which evoked the figure of the girl, his companion. Then Stein had been pulled in by the god of dreams because Stein had praised the picture of the girl.

It is always interesting to try and trace the sources of a dream—these were plain enough.

Whilst he was meditating upon them the thought came: "That girl, and you don't even know her name, has changed your path. It was the sketch of her seen by Stein that made him commission this picture which is taking you to Ragusa. You had not intended going there. Remember, after Mostar you had intended going to Stolatz and from there to Predoi, and from there home by Neverinza and Ulog, striking the railway again at Konzitsa. Now you are going from Mostar south to the sea—to Ragusa. And all because you sketched a girl by the wayside."

He came down to the road and resumed his way, falling into a philosophical meditation on the trivial

things that are yet able to deflect the course of events. Accidents and trifles, or what we call accidents and trifles, for since all things have structure, from the atom to the human brain, can we deny structure to history, and if History is a structural growth then nothing connected with it is trivial or accidental, and Fate is a reality. So he argued, but being by nature ungiven to philosophy he tired of the speculation before reaching the first bend of the road. His mind turned instead to the girl and the old man.

It was possible that he might overtake those two before reaching Mostar; they had a day's start, it is true, and the girl had spoken of getting lifts on the way, taking not the main road, but this road through the hills; all the same, it was possible that round some corner he might meet them.

The road here bends between hills, and here and there as he reached a bend he looked ahead, sometimes the far road was desolate, sometimes it showed a figure or two, a peasant driving a mule, a woman carrying a bundle, but never what he sought.