

The League of Lost Causes

Being the Romantic Adventures of Paul Lane, American Millionaire

How the Kaiser Went to Paris

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GROSEN for his position, his tactfulness and his discretion, Lord Claude occupied the post of secretary to what might fairly be called the most exalted club in Europe. A young man, barely turned thirty, after a brilliant career at Oxford, he had declined the honors that might legitimately have been his, and had chosen instead to wander from court to court among the highways of Europe. Wherever he went he made friends. He was one of those silent Treshams who have played and still play so large a part behind the noisy politicians in whose control the destinies of Europe are supposed to lie. At present, however, he was engaged in a wider sphere of operations than the field of English politics allowed. He was secretary to what was nicknamed among its exalted members the "Black Cabinet"—more familiarly, the "Blacks."

Rumor ascribed to the aged emperor of Austria, Franz Joseph, the formulation of this unique conception of a club of reigning monarchs. Certainly the proposition, whoever had propounded it, was taken up with alacrity. In these days of democracy kings must preserve the dignities of their order, even if it necessitates the formation of a royal trades union. What more fitting, then, than that the club should be inaugurated in Paris, where kings and emperors love to spend their holidays, far from the cares of state and pomp of power?

Most of the ruling sovereigns, and not a few prospective or deposed ones, were members of the club, but not all were of the first order. The "Blacks," in fact, comprised a limited number of the graver rulers, who were pledged to diverse things, but mainly to stand by one another and discountenance the spread of republican doctrines, to preserve the peace of Europe, and to act together in case that peace were menaced by the ambitions of the smaller, restless kings. The club was, theoretically, always in session, though it had no fixed meeting place. Lord Claude Tresham was traveling secretary, and carried the minutes of the meetings under his hat. The leaders of the "Blacks" were: Franz Joseph of Austria, Gustav of Sweden, George of England, Victor of Italy, George of Greece, Charles of Roumania and Haakon of Norway. "Outside" members, who were looked on with a certain suspicion, on account of their spirit of adventure and recklessness, though they were nominally of the club, were the czar, the kaiser and Ferdinand of Bulgaria.

Given the black, the red must be created if it does not exist. The "Reds" were not members, but it was understood that they, too, were pledged to support each other in their various schemes. They comprised Alfonso of Spain, ex-King Manuel of Portugal, Peter of Servia, Nicholas of Montenegro and a number of leading statesmen, pledged in the main to overthrow democracy and the constitutional monarchies and to revive the spirit of absolutism in Europe. But for their support of Polish ambitions they might have numbered the wavering Czar Nicholas among their members. They were represented in western Europe by Jean Rosny of Paris, and it was to him that Paul Lane, American millionaire and would-be adventurer of fortune, made his reports.

The successful issue of his Moroccan mission had given Paul the hope that admission to the secret councils of the "Reds" might be his, that the mysterious woman whose urging had induced him to devote himself and his fortunes to the League of Lost Causes would again be seen by him, would reveal her identity and let him plead his love. That she was in high rank among the ancient families of Europe he was aware, that she scorned him as a mere moneyed American he suspected. But the memory of her burned in his heart like an inextinguishable fire, and the impossibility of even gaining audience with her embittered him. In his despondency he broached the subject to Jean Rosny anew.

The latter looked at him quizzically. "Paul, you are impatient," he said. "Tell me one thing; did you ally yourself with us in the hope of gaining your lady's affections, or out of sympathy with our cause?"

"It was because I believed in the cause," said Paul soberly. "But," he added naively, "undoubtedly it was the charming personality of Mademoiselle—"

and five men, four of them kings, waited gravely for the last to arrive. They had shaken off the gaiety that is so contagious in Paris, for the occasion was a momentous one. If he should not arrive?

"I know he will not come," said the Greek sovereign, playing with his bread. "He could not hope to escape recognition with those confounded Yankee journalists tagging him everywhere that he goes."

"I think he will come," said Haakon. "Did you ever know him to refuse an opportunity for such an adventure?"

"Yes, he'll come," answered Lord Claude. "Unfortunately because—"

The door opened and Monsieur Gabriel bowed to the floor like a fat angel of the Annunciation. And close behind him strode a tall, kingly figure, clad in a voluminous robe, which he threw into Monsieur Gabriel's arms, disclosing the personality of the kaiser himself.

His four brother sovereigns rose simultaneously and embraced him. Lord Claude bowed over his hand, and Wilhelm, seating himself at the vacant place, called loudly for wine. At the same moment two pretty waitresses appeared from behind a curtain, bearing the soup tureen and dishes, while Paul, as head waiter, loomed up important in the background. And so the dinner began.

They joked and chaffed with one another throughout the meal, the kaiser's presence lending an atmosphere of supreme good-fellowship to the proceedings. Lord Claude, impassive and inscrutable as he was, unbent at the kaiser's charming rattery. The meal was nearly ended before Haakon remembered something.

"By the way, Tresham," he said, "why did you remark that his majesty would come 'unfortunately'? That was the very word, I believe. Come, speak up and tell us."

"That," answered Tresham, "will form part of the subsequent proceedings of the club. The meeting," he added, looking at his watch, "will not begin till nine. It is now twenty minutes short of the hour."

The cloth was removed, walnuts were placed beside the port, in accordance with Monsieur Gabriel's immemorial custom, and the guests relaxed themselves in their chairs. The clock struck nine. Monsieur Gabriel, bowing low, dismissed himself to a chorus of compliments.

"Go now, mademoiselles," he said to the pretty waitresses. "Go, monsieur," he added to Paul. The latter moved with the girls toward the exit behind the curtain. His mission was in the making—ten minutes more and—

Then Lord Claude Tresham stood up in his chair. "One moment, please," he said. "Monsieur Gabriel, where did you get these ladies?"

"These ladies, monsieur, as you are pleased to call them, are experienced waitresses and highly recommended," answered the proprietor, smiling. "Mademoiselle Armine, here, served with the family of the Duc de Berry for three years. Mademoiselle Nannette grew up, as I may say, with the family of the Duc de Nemours. Her references are irreproachable."

"Enough," said Tresham. "You and Mademoiselle Armine may retire through the door. Mademoiselle Nannette remains; she wishes to speak with us."

"Gentlemen," he said, "you have wished to know why I referred to the visit of his majesty, the German emperor, as 'unfortunate.' We need have no secrets here. Our cards are all on the table. Your majesties, permit me to present Miss Nancy Shand."

The rulers inclined their heads gravely. "A friend of yours, Lord Tresham?" inquired the Greek sovereign blandly.

"No," answered Lord Claude curtly. "One of your confounded Yankee journalists, and the cleverest in Europe at the present day."

"The devil!" shouted the Greek king, springing up in his chair and then collapsing with an apologetic air. "Well, the fat's in the fire now," he muttered.

"Miss Shand," said Lord Tresham, addressing the very composed young lady, "you are here tonight because, by a stroke of good fortune, you have learned of the existence and meeting of our club."

mered; and then Lord Claude took in the situation. He ran toward the door, followed by the rest. They were too late. Advancing toward them came a file of six infantrymen, headed by a young lieutenant, who stopped six paces distant and motioned them back.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you are under arrest on the charge of conspiring against the French republic. You must come with me at once. Shall I read the warrant?"

The sovereigns looked at one another aghast. Arrest in Paris was no joke, even though the charges must fall and their release be effected immediately after they had reached the station house and held a confidential discussion with the sergeant in charge. But the kaiser—the kaiser, arrested in Paris!

But the monarchs' dismay was fully equalled by that of Paul, who, still attired in waiter's garb, lingered by the curtain. So far he had fulfilled his instructions admirably. It was necessary, as Lord Tresham had said, that the kaiser should be detained in France, while Peter and Nicholas of Montenegro carried out their schemes of agrarization. With this object in view he had arranged for the kidnapping of the distinguished guests and their temporary transference to a chateau in the vicinity of the French capital by a body of men selected from among the members of the league to raid the club under the guise of policemen and arrest the members as anarchists. But through some inscruta-

ble leakage the commandant of Paris had got wind of part of the affair and, believing that the police were about to arrest a notorious band of criminals, had resolved to anticipate them and obtain the credit for the army. The denouement was equally calamitous for both parties.

Paul sized up the situation before Tresham could put his wits together. The kings still clustered at the entrance to the dining-room; the officer was still fumbling with his papers. He sprang from behind the curtain and seized the kaiser by the arm, dashed back with him into the dining-room and ran to a sliding panel behind the big fireplace, a remnant of the stirring days of the thirties, when the last Bourbon reigned on his uneasy throne and conspiracy was rife in Paris. He pushed it back, disclosing a narrow flight of stairs.

At the head he hesitated. The woman journalist, who, all unsuspected by him, had also been present at the banquet—if she escaped she would reveal the story as Lord Tresham had told it to her, and his efforts would be useless. He must make her a captive as well as his majesty. And as he turned he uttered an exclamation of surprise, for there stood she beside them, her eyes alight with eagerness, and the great "story" of the year half written in her brain. Miss Nancy Shand was always on the spot when news was in the making.

Motioning to both to precede him, Paul pulled back the sliding panel into position just as the lieutenant, becoming aware of the flight of some members of the party, dashed into the dining-room to see only the furniture and the walls.

Black darkness confronted them, but Paul had learned the way before that night. He urged his charges down the narrow stairs until they found themselves, at a turn of the path, in a large, dimly-lit chamber of stone, with a stone door. Round this apartment were ranged enormous tuns in which Monsieur Gabriel stored his choice Burgundy from the Midi. Paul closed the door behind him—it had no key. Then he turned on his guests.

"You majesties," he said, "I owe you a thousand apologies. But I can save you. There is only one way out of your dilemma, and not a dignified one. Still—"

He walked toward the nearest tun and turned the spigot, and a rich crimson flood began to stain the stone of the floor. The next was empty, and the next also. Drawing himself backward, he shot his fist with all his might. The blow shattered the head of the tun into two pieces. Another blow did likewise to the second tun. Paul Lane removed the heads and returned, rubbing his injured knuckles.

"Sir," he said, "there is but one thing to be done. You must conceal yourself awhile from your enemies."

The kaiser looked at the tun despairingly. "You mean that I must creep in there?" he asked.

"There is no alternative, sir, unless you wish to surrender your person to your enemies."

"But the police!" the kaiser shouted. "The soldiers! Can such an outrage be perpetrated in the heart of Paris?"

"No, sir," said Paul. "It would mean only a temporary detention. But every hour's delay is likely to be fatal to

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"Spare me—spare my life!" he pleaded.

"To the devil with your miserable life! Where is Bulgini, the leader of the dynamiters?" cried the officer.

"I do not know, monsieur," Paul whined. "They threatened me and I ran away through the secret panel. Ah, he was terrible, that brigand Bulgini; his very mustaches seemed to bristle."

From somewhere, very far away, the very faintest knocking came, and the faintest of cries. Paul Lane seized the lieutenant by the arm.

"They must be above, in the flooring," he cried. "Ah, that loose plank that squeaked, I will get them, monsieur, I will—"

"Come on, men!" shouted the officer, and darted out of the cellar and up the stairs. Paul followed leisurely.

Thus it came about that their majesties of Sweden, Norway, Greece and Roumania made their appearance in the central police station of Paris. And in a short while they were released with the most abject apologies. The secret was kept, for, by a miracle of luck, there were no reporters present.

But when the news was telegraphed in several clippers to the capitals of Europe that same night and no word came of the kaiser, it is reported that Bethmann-Hollweg tore his hair and drafted a dozen different letters of resignation. Meanwhile Servia and Montenegro dispatched an ultimatum to Constantinople to demand certain advantages, and there was none to rat-

ify the arrival of his baby brother three days before, had been on tip-toe for a slight of him, was at last admitted to the chamber.

As he entered the dim room, he saw behind a screen the pink body lying on the lap of the white-capped nurse, who, having just given it a bath, was shaking powder over it from a perforated box.

At the sight a look of horror overspread the chubby face of Bennie. Toddling to his mother's bedside, he whispered in awed tones:

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He pushed it back, disclosing a narrow flight of stairs.

Alfred Morris