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My Revelations as a Spy

By Stephen Leacock
Illustrated by F. Strothmann

IN MANY people the very name "Spy" excites a shudder of apprehension; we Spies, in fact, get quite used to being shunned at. None of us Spies mind it at all. Whenever I enter a hotel and register myself as a Spy I am quite accustomed to see a thrill of fear run through the clerks, or clerk, behind the desk.

Us Spies or We Spies—for we call ourselves both—are thus a race apart. None know us. All fear us. Where do we live? Nowhere. Where are we? Everywhere. Frequently we don't know ourselves where we are. The secret orders that we receive come from so high up that it is often forbidden to us even to ask where we are. A friend of mine, or at least a Fellow Spy—us Spies have no friends—one of the most brilliant men in the Hungarian Secret Service, once spent a month in New York under the impression that he was in Winnipeg. If this happened to the most brilliant, think of the others.

All, I say, fear us. Because they know and have reason to know our power. Hence, in spite of the prejudice against us, we are able to move everywhere, to lodge in the best hotels, and enter any society that we wish to penetrate.

Let me relate an incident to illustrate this: A month ago I entered one of the largest of the New York hotels which I will merely call the B. Hotel without naming it: to do so might blast it. We Spies, in fact, never name a hotel. At the most we indicate it by a number known only to ourselves, such as 1, 2, or 3.

On my presenting myself at the desk the clerk informed me that he had no room vacant. I knew this of course to be a mere subterfuge; whether or not he suspected that I was a Spy I cannot say. I was muffled up, to avoid recognition, in a long overcoat with the collar turned up and reaching well above my ears, and wore a very low Christie hat with a sweeping brim to conceal my eyes; a heavy black beard and moustache, that I had slipped on in entering the hotel, concealed my face. "Let me speak a moment to the manager," I said. When he came I beckoned him aside and taking his ear in my hand I breathed two words into it. "Good heavens!" he gasped, while his face turned pale as ashes. "Is it enough?" I asked. "Can I have a room, or must I breathe again?" "No, no," said the manager, still trembling. Then, turning to the clerk: "Give this gentleman a room," he said, "and give him a bath."

What these two words are that will get a room in New York at once I must not divulge. Even now, when the veil of secrecy is being lifted, the international interests involved are too complicated to permit it. Suffice it to say that if these two had failed I know a couple of others still better.

I narrate this incident, otherwise trivial, as indicating the astounding ramifications and the ubiquity of the international spy system. A similar illustration occurs to me as I write. I was walking the other day with another gentleman—or at least with a gentleman—on upper B. Way a little south of C. Park at a point about half-way between the T. Building and the W. Garden.

"Do you see that man over there?" I said, pointing from the side of the street on which we were walking on the sidewalk to the other side opposite to the side that we were on.

"The man with the straw hat?" he asked. "Yes, what of him?"

"Oh, nothing," I answered, "except that he's a Spy!"



Taking the hotel manager's ear in my hand I breathed two words into it: "Good heavens!" he gasped, while his face turned pale as ashes. "Give this gentleman a room," he said, "and give him a bath!"

"Great heavens!" exclaimed my acquaintance leaning up against a lamppost for support. "A Spy! How do you know that? What does it mean?"

I gave a quiet laugh—we Spies learn to laugh very quietly. "Ha!" I said, "that is my secret, my friend. *Verbum sapientibus! Che sarò sarà!* Yodel doodle doo!"

My acquaintance fell in a dead faint upon the street. I watched them take him away in an ambulance. Will the reader be surprised to learn that among the white-coated attendants who removed him I recognized no less a person than the famous Russian spy Pouliuspantzoff? What he was doing there I could not tell. No doubt his orders came from so high that he himself did not know. I had seen him only twice before—once when we were both disguised as Zulus at Bulawayo, and once in the interior of China, at the time when Pouliuspantzoff made his secret entry into Thibet concealed in a tea-case. He was inside the tea-case when I saw him; so at least I was informed by the coolies who carried it. Yet I recognized him instantly. Neither he nor I, however, gave any sign of recognition other than an imperceptible movement of the outer eyelid. (We Spies learn to move the outer lid of the eye so imperceptibly that it cannot be seen.) Yet after meeting Pouliuspantzoff in this way I was not surprised to read in the evening papers a few hours afterward that the uncle of the young King of Siam had been assassinated. The connection between these two events I am unfortunately not at liberty to explain; the consequences to the Vatican could be too serious. I doubt if it could remain top-side up.

These, however, are but passing incidents in a life filled with danger and excitement. They would have remained unrecorded and unrevealed like the rest of my revelations were it not that certain recent events have to some extent removed

the seal of secrecy from my lips. The death of a certain royal sovereign makes it possible for me to divulge things hitherto undivulged. Even now I can only tell a part, a small part, of the terrific things that I know. When more sovereigns die I can divulge more. I hope to keep on divulging at intervals for years. But I am compelled to be cautious. My relations with the Wilhelmstrasse and the Ballplatz are so intricate, my connection with Downing Street and the Quai d'Orsay so intimate, and my footing with the Yildiz Kiosk and the Waldorf-Astoria and Childs Restaurants are so delicate that a single *faux pas* might prove to be a fatal step.

It is now seventeen years since I entered the Secret Service of the G. Empire. During this time my activities have taken me into every quarter of the globe, at times even into every eighth or sixteenth of it. It was I who first brought back word to the Imperial Chancellor of the existence of an *Entente* between England and France. "Is there an *Entente*?" he asked me, trembling with excitement, on my arrival at the Wilhelmstrasse. "Your Excellency," I said, "there is." He groaned. "Can you stop it?" he asked.

"Don't ask me," I said sadly. "Where must we strike?" demanded the Chancellor. "Fetch me a map," I said. "They did so. I laid my finger on it. "There!" I said. "Quick, quick," said the Chancellor, "look where his finger is." They lifted it up. "Morocco!" they cried. I had meant it for Abyssinia but it was too late to change. That night the warship *Panther* sailed under sealed orders. The rest is history, or at least history and geography.

In the same way it was I who brought word to the Wilhelmstrasse of the *Rapprochement* between England and Russia in Persia. "What did you find?" asked the Chancellor as I laid aside the Russian disguise in which I had traveled. "A *Rapprochement!*" I said. He groaned. "They seem to get all the best words," he said.

I shall always feel, to my regret, that I am personally responsible for the outbreak of the present war. It may have had ulterior causes. But there is no doubt that it was precipitated by the fact that, for the first time in (Continued on page 428)

MY REVELATIONS AS A SPY

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seventeen years, I took a six weeks' vacation in June and July of 1914. The consequences of that vacation I ought to have foreseen. Yet I took such precautions as I could. "Do you think?" I asked, "that you can preserve the *status quo* for six weeks, merely six weeks, if I stop spying and take a rest?" "We'll try," they answered. "Remember," I said, as I packed my things, "keep the Dardanelles closed; have the Sandjak of Novi Bazaar properly patrolled, and let the Dubrudska remain under a *modus vivendi* till I come back."

Two weeks later, while sipping my coffee at a Kurfurst in the Schwarzwald, I read in the newspaper that a German army had invaded France and was fighting the French, and that the English expeditionary force had crossed the Channel. "This," I said to myself, "means war." As usual, I was right.

It was during the third year of the war that I received a peremptory summons from the head of the Imperial Secret Service at Berlin, Baron Fisch von Gestern. "I want to see you," it read. Nothing more. In the life of a Spy one learns to think quickly and to think is to act. I gathered as soon as I received the dispatch that for some reason or other Fisch von Gestern was anxious to see me, having, as I instantly inferred, something to say to me. This conjecture proved correct.

The Baron was at my entrance with military correctness and shook hands.

"Are you willing," he inquired, "to undertake a mission to America?"

"I am," I answered.

"Very good. How soon can you start?"

"As soon as I have paid the few bills that I owe in Berlin," I replied.

"We can hardly wait for that," said my chief, "and in any case it might excite comment. You must start to-night."

"Very good," I said.

"Such," said the Baron, "are the Kaiser's orders. Here is an American passport and a photograph that will answer the purpose. The likeness is not great but it is sufficient."

"But," I objected, abashed for a moment, "this photograph is of a man with whiskers, and I am, unfortunately, clean-shaven."

"The orders are imperative," said Von Gestern, with official hauteur. "You must start to-night. You can grow whiskers this afternoon."

"Very good," I replied.

"And now to the business of your mission," continued the Baron. "The United States, as you have perhaps heard, is making war against Germany."

"I have heard so," I replied.

"Yes," continued Von Gestern. "The fact has leaked out, how we do not know, and is being widely reported. His Imperial Majesty has decided to stop the war with the United States." I bowed.

"He intends to send over a secret treaty of the same nature as the one recently made with his recent Highness the recent Czar of Russia. Under this treaty Germany promises to give to the United States the whole of continental Africa and in return the United States is to give to Germany the whole of China. There are other provisions, but I need not trouble you with them. Your mission relates, not to the actual treaty, but to the preparation of the ground." I bowed again.

"These then are your instructions," said the Baron, speaking more distinctly than to impress his words upon my memory. "On your arrival in the United States you will follow the accredited methods that are known to be used by all the best spires of the highest diplomacy. You have no doubt read some of the books, almost manuals of instruction, that they have written?"

"I have read many of them," I said.

"Very well. You must, however, then, to say, enter and move everywhere in the best society. Marks specially please, that you must not only *enter* it but you must *move*. You must, if I put it so, get a move on." I bowed.

"You must mix freely with the members of the Cabinet. You must dine with them. This is a most necessary matter and one to be kept well in mind. Dine with them often

in such a way as to make yourself familiar to them. Will you do this?" I said.

"Very good. But this is only a part. You are expected also to familiarize yourself with the leaders of the great financial interests. You are to put yourself on such a footing with them as to borrow large sums of money from them. Do you object to this?"

"No," I said frankly. "I do not."

"Good! You will also mingle freely in Ambassadorial and foreign circles. It would be well for you to dine, at least once a week, with the British Ambassador. And now one final word," he said. Von Gestern spoke with singular impressiveness—"as to the President of the United States—"

"Yes," I said.

"You must mix with him on a footing of the most open-handed friendliness. Be at the White House continually. Make yourself in the full sense of the words the friend and adviser of the President. All this I think is clear. In fact, it is only what is presentiment by the masters of international diplomacy."

"Precisely," I said.

"Very good. And then," continued the Baron, "as soon as you find yourself sufficiently *en rapport* with everybody—or I should say," he added in correction, "for the Baron shares fully in the present German horror of imported French words, "when you find yourself sufficiently *en rapport* with everybody," you must then proceed to advance your peace terms. And now, my dear fellow," said the Baron with a touch of genuine cordiality, "one word more. Are you in need of money?"

"Yes," I said.

"I thought so. But you will find that you need less and less as you go on. Mean time, good-by, and best wishes for you success."

Such was, such is, in fact, the mission with which I am accredited. I regard it as by far the most important mission with which have been accredited by the Wilhelmstrasse. Yet I am compelled to admit that up to the present it has proved unsuccessful. My attempts to carry it out have been baffled. There is something, perhaps, in the atmosphere of this republic which obstructs the working of high diplomacy. For over five months I have been waiting in vain to dine with the American Cabinet. They have not invited me. For four weeks I sat each night waiting in the J. Hotel in Washington with my suit on ready to be asked if they did not come near me.

Nor have I yet received an intimation from the British Embassy inviting me to an informal lunch or to midnight supper with the Ambassador. Everybody I know, including myself, in the ranks of the international spy system will realize that without these invitations one can do nothing. Not has the President of the United States given any sign. I have sent word to him, in cipher, that I am ready to dine with him on any day that may be convenient to both of us. He made no move in the matter.

My attempts to approach them have been misunderstood, and have led to my being compelled to leave the Hotel. The fact that I was compelled to leave it, owing to reasons that I cannot reveal, without paying my account has occasioned unnecessary and dangerous comment. I connect it in fact, with the singular attitude adopted by the Hotel on my arrival in New York, to which I have already referred.

I have therefore been compelled to fall back on revelations made to me by the Baron. I have to leave the American atmosphere singularly ungracious. I have offered to reveal to the Secretary of State the entire family history of Ferdinand of Bulgaria for fifty dollars. He says it is not worth it. I have offered to the British Embassy the inside story of the abdication of Constantine for five dollars. They say they know it and knew it before it happened. I have offered to little more than a million dollars to blacken the character of every reigning prince in Europe. I am told that it is not necessary.

Meantime, as it is impossible to return to Central Europe, I expect to open either a fruit store or a peanut stand very shortly in this great metropolis. I imagine that many of my former colleagues will soon be doing the same!