

## The Man Who Ran Europe.

BY FRANK L. POLLOCK.



HE man's name was Ranon, and he was Spanish by birth, American by education, and, at the time of this narrative, anarchistic and destructive by inclination. He had been in the Spanish diplomatic service since he was eighteen, at Washington, New Orleans, Liverpool, Genoa, and finally in the government offices at Manilla in the Philippines. During these fifteen years, besides becoming an accomplished linguist, he had picked up a good deal in the way of experience and among other things he had learned practically almost all the different secret codes or ciphers in which the foreign consuls telegraph important information to their respective governments.

But as the years slipped on, and he found himself occupying much the same sort of minor under-paid post as at the beginning, it did not seem to him that the service was all it should be. Fifty times he saw an inexperienced stripling shoved in over his head, because, forsooth, the stripling's uncle or brother-in-law controlled votes, or stocks, or newspapers, or mobs. And all the while he missed promotion, and was refused leave, and toiled along on eleven hundred dollars a year, because he had no stockholding, mob-wielding relative who must be placated.

Thus Ranon became cynical, destructive, and pessimistic. He fermented with indignation against everything, including diplomatic service in general, and the Spanish service in particular. He considered that the political world was going to the — ahem! — to the dogs. International diplomacy was a hollow and whitewashed farce. He would have liked to see a general European war, in which Spain should be soundly thrashed. He was American by education, as I said, and he never had much affection for his native land; rather less just at present. Besides, he had seen too much of government from the inside to have any patriotism left.

"If I were only a king," he reflected one evening over his cigaritto, and then pulled himself up by the discovery that nothing less than the dictatorship of all Europe would satisfy his expansive desires. He felt that he would like to set half Europe by the ears, while he looked omnipotently on, as he might at the bull ring. Then, when this genial sport palled, he would execute a few obnoxious individuals, alter a few boundaries, do away with the diplomatic service, and abandon himself to the delights of ruling.

Now, if Ranon had been a Spaniard alone, he might have evolved this fantastic idea, but it would never have been more than a dream. Being half American, and therefore practical, his brain automatically set itself, half humorously, to seek a solid road to this ideal.

For several months the notion possessed his mind, and he entertained it with just a shade of seriousness. He read with interest of filibusters, of dynamiters, and of *coups d'état*. He thought of joining himself to the rebels inland, who would welcome him for his special knowledge; he read European politics with avidity, and studied international law with ardor. But it was more than half in jest, till his great idea came upon him one evening like a galvanic shock.

In the sudden consciousness, he got up, threw away his cheroot, and paced the bamboo verandah with swelling breast. The lights of Manilla twinkled through the shaded streets; the ship lanterns glowed from the harbor; the China Seas were outside, and beyond lay India, Russia, Austria, France, Germany, Spain, and Ranon felt that these lay, as it were, in the hollow of his hand,—and by the simplest means.

He did not delay about executing his design once he had conceived it, and the thought that his own execution might follow did not deter him in the least. He handed in his resignation at the offices in the city, and contemplated his politely surprised chief with an air of authority that caused that official more wonder than ever. Then to Hong-Kong he went on the bi-monthly steamer, and returned with a lot of electrical apparatus, and a "mirror galvanometer" telegraph instrument, constructed for submarine cabling.

Now it is the case that only one electric wire connects the Philippines with civilization, and that is laid from Manilla to Hong-Kong. It enters the sea at the northwestern corner of the city, in a somewhat secluded quarter, and before it connects with the land wire is buried in the sand of the beach, to protect it from injury. In this secluded quarter Ranon hired a house, and every night he went down to the beach, carrying a spade and other tools. In a few days, if any one had investigated the matter, he would have found the cable cut in two, and the ends separated by a piece of rubber,—a thin film, but as good as a mile. To each of the severed ends was attached a copper wire, and, if the explorer had traced up these wires, he would have found them leading, mostly by underground routes, in the direction of Ranon's house.

There was a good deal of difficulty at first in arranging the connections, and in getting the hang of the peculiar cable instruments, for Ranon was used only to land telegraphy. But at last all seemed right, and early one morning he wired to the Foreign Office at Madrid, using the Spanish cipher, as follows:—

Three German war-ships entered Manilla Harbor at 6 A. M. Their commodore informs me that he intends landing marines to protect German subjects in case of the insurgents attacking the city. There is no possibility of the insurgents attacking the city. Our fleet is scattered along the coast on blockade duty. Wire instructions.

To this bit of fiction he signed the name of the Spanish governor. About two hours later he telegraphed again:—

Armed soldiers and sailors have been landed in spite of my remonstrances. Am unable to use force. Suspect that the Germans are secretly in league with the rebels, who are now said to be massing near the city.

In a few minutes more, using the German official cipher, he sent this message to Berlin:—

Six German subjects have been massacred without provocation by the Spanish soldiery. Have demanded an indemnity. Wire instructions.

To this he signed the name of the German consul at Manilla. Then, having despatched his bombshells, he sat back and waited. It is a matter of almost thirty hours to telegraph between Manilla and Madrid.

An unforeseen embarrassment began to develop itself about this time. As the day advanced, numbers of messages began to come in, both from the continent for Manilla, and from Manilla for all parts of the world. Every one of these Ranon was obliged to take off and read before forwarding it, lest it should contain information whose transmission might shatter his careful framework of duplicity. All these, however, happened to be short and unimportant private despatches, which he transmitted at once, toiling and sweating to keep pace with the flashing mirror of the instrument. It was hard and trying work, but in an hour or two the press slackened, and he was enabled to rest.

But meanwhile there was dismay in two ministries of Europe, hurry and worry, consternation and telegraphing to ambassadors. Spain informed her representative at Berlin of the state of affairs, but warned him on no account to speak or act without further instructions. Telegrams were sent from Madrid to inform the Philippine governor that he must endeavor to have the foreign war-ships withdrawn, peaceably if possible; if not, by the threat of force. From Berlin, the German consul was informed that he must see to it that there were no more murders. He was empowered to threaten force, if necessary. And the diplomats of both countries made it the chief business of their lives that no inkling of the complication should leak out of the council chamber.

The man chuckled diabolically as he read the replies, and at once replied to Spain that the war-ships refused to withdraw, and that the German soldiers were behaving insolently in the town. To Berlin he said that the Spanish governor refused an indemnity, that he had treated his representations with insolence, and that there was a popular agitation against the Germans, whose lives were no longer safe. He suggested that war-ships be sent.

When these telegrams were severally received, both governments decided that it was time to take steps. The Spanish Legate at Berlin was instructed to bring the case before the German ministry. This he did, and was met with a square repudiation of the whole affair. No German war vessels had been sent to Philippine waters. Meanwhile the German ambassador at Madrid had complained of the massacres to the Spanish foreign Secretary, and had been received with a denial of any knowledge

of the affair. Then both nations disbelieved each other, ordered men-of-war to be held in readiness, redoubled their precautions for secrecy, and telegraphed to the East for further detail.

Ranon had a bell arranged to ring when a message came in, and its jingle continually awoke him in the dead of night. He was tired, for he had been kept awake, more or less, for several nights by the wire. The perplexities of office began to weigh, and he reflected that he had never really known before how hard kings and prime ministers had to work. He supplied the required details, however, at considerable length. He told Spain that the German officers planned to establish a protectorate over the island, as a preliminary, no doubt, to making it over to the rebels. He told Berlin that several Germans had been dragged from their houses and maltreated, and that the German flag had been publicly insulted. He added that the governor refused to investigate these atrocities.

Being informed of this, the Spanish ambassador at Berlin made further complaints, only to be received with a blank face. Thereupon the diplomat nearly lost his temper, accused the Teutonic ministry of playing a double game, demanded his passports, and went to pack his trunks. Germany at once began to sound the Triple Alliance, to ascertain just what practical support she would receive in case of war, and a great many secret messages passed between Berlin, Vienna, and Rome.

Spain received the remonstrances of the German ambassador with equal doubt and suspicion. She had secret information of the German machinations in Central Europe, and she at once began to work in the direction of an alliance with France. Considerable concessions were given to several enormous French syndicates, and messages of diplomatic friendship began to be exchanged between the two countries. Without delay she commanded that four first-class cruisers be at once started for the East, and at the same time wired to Manilla to have the whole Philippine fleet concentrated, and to resist further German interference, if necessary, by force of arms.

The man at the center of all this coil learned of it by the messages pouring in from every capital of Europe for their respective agents. He worked breathlessly in the hot, darkened room till the flickering indicator made his brain reel and swim, and he closed

his eyes for a moment, only to be jerked back to the demands of his new kingdom by the tinkling of the electric bell. But all his weariness could not dull his consciousness to the fact that it was by his solitary machinations that Europe was being divided into two camps, and that the telegraph key beneath his finger was the lever that held half of civilization in a wavering balance.

From the hurrying sequence of telegrams that followed each other with feverish rapidity he learned that the Triple Alliance held; that war fleets were being rapidly overhauled all through the Mediterranean and the North Sea; that German battle-ships were on their way to Manilla; that the neutrality of Russia was doubtful; of England and the United States, almost certain; that Alsace and Lorraine were being stirred up; that the Spanish-French cordiality was increasing; that Metz was being heavily garrisoned, and that every nation in Europe had its finger on the trigger, while the respective populaces were still in delightful and wholesome ignorance of the fact.

All this time the inhabitants of Manilla had reposed in equal unconsciousness of the international thunders muttering about their heads. Private messages had passed over the cable without interruption, and whenever Ranon had found it necessary to suppress a despatch he always returned a fabricated reply, after a suitable time. Thus no suspicion was aroused. It takes time for a war fleet to steam to Manilla, even from the nearest Spanish or German stations, and during all this interval Ranon was bombarded without respite with telegrams from Europe. He had fancied that he knew European politics indifferent well, but every hour he was confronted with some revelation that made his hair stand. Indeed, even had the jingling of the electric bell been silenced, curiosity concerning these international intrigues would have been enough to banish sleep. There were also private despatches without number, about beef or sugar or tobacco, and press telegrams, and all these had to be supervised, while the bell was jingling and the galvanometer flashing, and the two war fleets plowing nearer and nearer the city, and the gun factories all over the world working night and day, and the whole grim farce tragedy momentarily drawing to a head.

For a hundred hours Ranon had not slept, washed, or eaten any-

thing but snatched mouthfuls, and the strain was terrific. Haggard, unshaven, and blear-eyed, he bent over the diabolical instruments and read into the deepest depths of political darkness, and supplied such answers as seemed suitable. Had he been made of ordinary stuff, he would have abdicated his uneasy throne; but he stuck to it and sent out more details, shocking ones with plenty of sensation.

On the morning of the sixth sleepless night Ranon could distinctly feel all the tangled State secrets clicking and revolving like little cog-wheels in his head. A big drink of hot, strong coffee quieted them for awhile, but at every jingle of the electric bell they would start awirling again with a jump.

This was not to be endured. He could scarcely see the indicator, but he worked on till the clash and rattle in his skull drowned the noise of the key, and showed him that for such a king as he was there was neither rest, nor sleep, nor peace. He got up, stood irresolutely for a moment, and then took a heavy hammer and crashed it down into the bunch of gleaming and oscillating instruments upon the table; and the little cog-wheels stopped.

It was steamer day. He took the scraps of flattened brass and copper and flung them into the sea, then tore up the wires for a hundred yards from the house, and took passage for Yokohama. He slept almost all the way, and in Japan he disappeared in the maze of steamer lines that cut up the whole Pacific.

The Eastern world was a good deal surprised to find its communication with Manilla suddenly cut, and a corps of electricians was set to examine the cable. There was more surprise when the rubber-jointed break was discovered, and most of all when a few telegrams had been exchanged with Western Europe. The governor and the whole body of foreign consuls worked day and night for a week, and when the Spanish cruisers and the German battle-ships arrived, sea worn and menacing, the officers were invited to a council and afterwards to a ball, while the sailors fraternized over cheroots and saki. So the danger was averted.

The makers of newspapers never got hold of it, and the makers of Blue Books naturally avoided the subject, so that this is the first and only account of this remarkable episode,—how one anarchist made himself king, and such a king as never was! How do I know? Well, I'm the man who ran Europe.