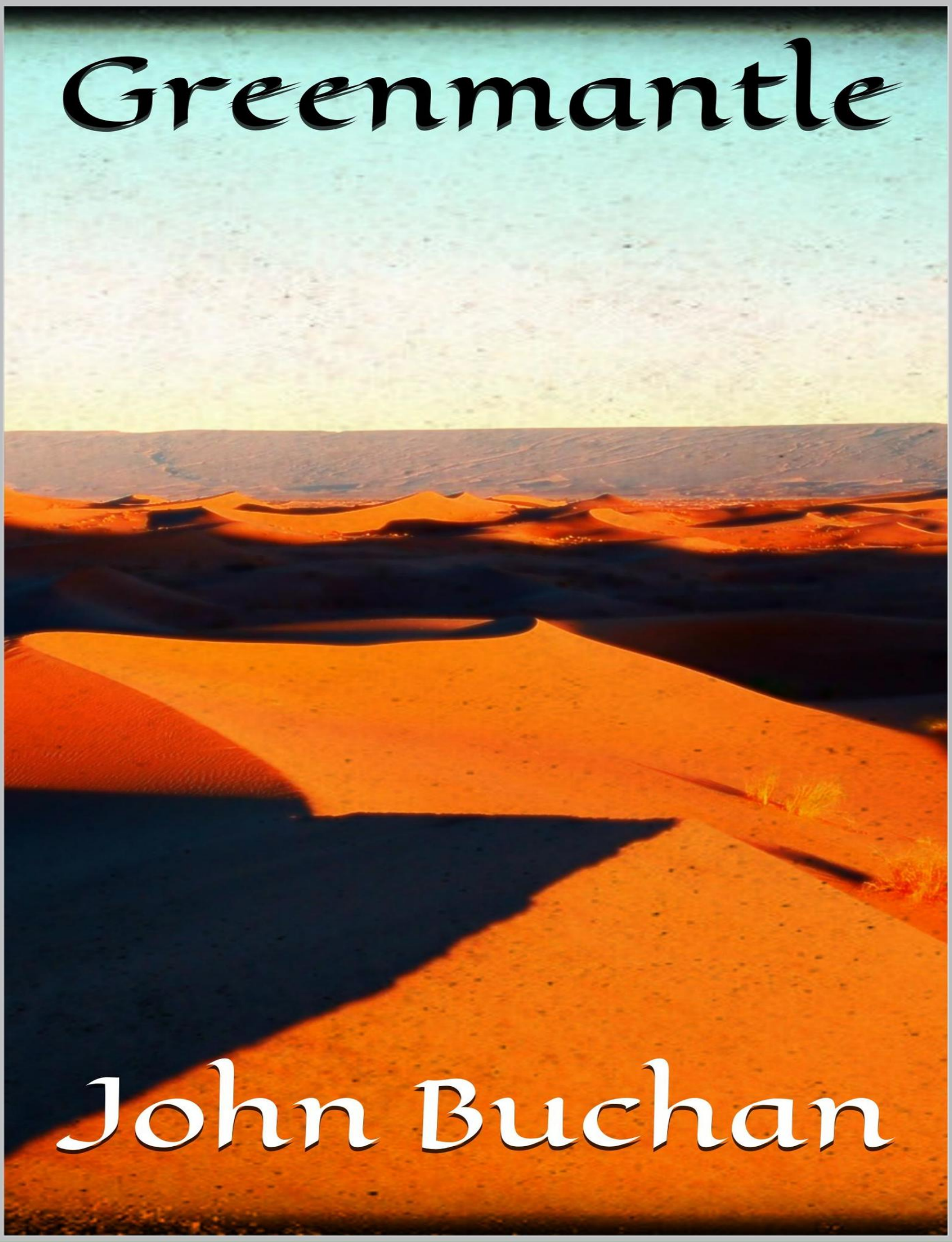
Greenmantle



John Buchan

Greenmantle

Greenmantle

John Buchan

PREFACE

During the past year, in the intervals of an active life, I have amused myself with constructing this tale. It has been scribbled in every kind of odd place and moment—in England and abroad, during long journeys, in half-hours between graver tasks; and it bears, I fear, the mark of its gipsy begetting. But it has amused me to write, and I shall be well repaid if it amuses you—and a few others—to read. Let no man or woman call its events improbable. The war has driven that word from our vocabulary, and melodrama has become the prosiest realism. Things unimagined before happen daily to our friends by sea and land. The one chance in a thousand is habitually taken, and as often as not succeeds. Coincidence, like some new Briareus, stretches a hundred long arms hourly across the earth. Some day, when the full history is written—sober history with ample documents—the poor romancer will give up business and fall to reading Miss Austen in a hermitage. The characters of the tale, if you think hard, you will recall. Sandy you know well. That great spirit was last heard of at Basra, where he occupies the post that once was Harry Bullivant's. Richard Hannay is where he longed to be, commanding his battalion on the ugliest bit of front in the West. Mr John S. Blenkiron, full of honour and wholly cured of dyspepsia, has returned to the States, after vainly endeavouring to take Peter with him. As for Peter, he has attained the height of his ambition. He has shaved his beard and joined the Flying Corps.

CHAPTER 1

A MISSION IS PROPOSED

I had just finished breakfast and was filling my pipe when I got Bullivant's telegram. It was at Furling, the big country house in Hampshire where I had come to convalesce after Loos, and Sandy, who was in the same case, was hunting for the marmalade. I flung him the flimsy with the blue strip pasted down on it, and he whistled.

'Hullo, Dick, you've got the battalion. Or maybe it's a staff billet. You'll be a blighted brass-hat, coming it heavy over the hard-working regimental officer. And to think of the language you've wasted on brass-hats in your time!'

I sat and thought for a bit, for the name 'Bullivant' carried me back eighteen months to the hot summer before the war. I had not seen the man since, though I had read about him in the papers. For more than a year I had been a busy battalion officer, with no other thought than to hammer a lot of raw stuff into good soldiers. I had succeeded pretty well, and there was no prouder man on earth than Richard Hannay when he took his Lennox Highlanders over the parapets on that glorious and bloody 25th day of September. Loos was no picnic, and we had had some ugly bits of scrapping before that, but the worst bit of the campaign I had seen was a tea-party to the show I had been in with Bullivant before the war started.

The sight of his name on a telegram form seemed to change all my outlook on life. I had been hoping for the command of the battalion, and looking forward to being in at the finish with Brother Boche. But this message jerked my thoughts on to a new road. There might be other things in the war than straightforward fighting. Why on earth should the Foreign Office want to see an obscure Major of the New

Army, and want to see him in double-quick time?
'I'm going up to town by the ten train,' I announced; 'I'll be back in time for dinner.'
'Try my tailor,' said Sandy. 'He's got a very nice taste in red tabs. You can use my name.' An idea struck me. 'You're pretty well all right now. If I wire for you, will you pack your own kit and mine and join me?'
'Right-o! I'll accept a job on your staff if they give you a corps. If so be as you come down tonight, be a good chap and bring a barrel of oysters from Sweeting's.'
I travelled up to London in a regular November drizzle, which cleared up about Wimbledon to watery sunshine. I never could stand London during the war. It seemed to have lost its bearings and broken out into all manner of badges and uniforms which did not fit in with my notion of it. One felt the war more in its streets than in the field, or rather one felt the confusion of war without feeling the purpose. I dare say it was all right; but since August 1914 I never spent a day in town without coming home depressed to my boots.
I took a taxi and drove straight to the Foreign Office. Sir Walter did not keep me waiting long. But when his secretary took me to his room I would not have recognized the man I had known eighteen months before.
His big frame seemed to have dropped flesh and there was a stoop in the square shoulders. His face had lost its rosiness and was red in patches, like that of a man who gets too little fresh air. His hair was much greyer and very thin about the temples, and there were lines of overwork below the eyes. But the eyes were the same as before, keen and kindly and shrewd, and there was no change in the firm set of the jaw.
'We must on no account be disturbed for the next hour,' he told his secretary. When the young man had gone he went across to both doors and turned the keys in them.
'Well, Major Hannay,' he said, flinging himself into a chair

beside the fire. 'How do you like soldiering?'
'Right enough,' I said, 'though this isn't just the kind of war I would have picked myself. It's a comfortless, bloody business. But we've got the measure of the old Boche now, and it's dogged as does it. I count on getting back to the front in a week or two.'
'Will you get the battalion?' he asked. He seemed to have followed my doings pretty closely.
'I believe I've a good chance. I'm not in this show for honour and glory, though. I want to do the best I can, but I wish to heaven it was over. All I think of is coming out of it with a whole skin.'
He laughed. 'You do yourself an injustice. What about the forward observation post at the Lone Tree? You forgot about the whole skin then.'
I felt myself getting red. 'That was all rot,' I said, 'and I can't think who told you about it. I hated the job, but I had to do it to prevent my subalterns going to glory. They were a lot of fire-eating young lunatics. If I had sent one of them he'd have gone on his knees to Providence and asked for trouble.'
Sir Walter was still grinning.
'I'm not questioning your caution. You have the rudiments of it, or our friends of the Black Stone would have gathered you in at our last merry meeting. I would question it as little as your courage. What exercises my mind is whether it is best employed in the trenches.'
'Is the War Office dissatisfied with me?' I asked sharply.
'They are profoundly satisfied. They propose to give you command of your battalion. Presently, if you escape a stray bullet, you will no doubt be a Brigadier. It is a wonderful war for youth and brains. But... I take it you are in this business to serve your country, Hannay?'
'I reckon I am,' I said. 'I am certainly not in it for my health.'
He looked at my leg, where the doctors had dug out the

shrapnel fragments, and smiled quizzically.
'Pretty fit again?' he asked.
'Tough as a sjambok. I thrive on the racket and eat and sleep like a schoolboy.'
He got up and stood with his back to the fire, his eyes staring abstractedly out of the window at the wintry park.
'It is a great game, and you are the man for it, no doubt. But there are others who can play it, for soldiering today asks for the average rather than the exception in human nature. It is like a big machine where the parts are standardized. You are fighting, not because you are short of a job, but because you want to help England. How if you could help her better than by commanding a battalion—or a brigade—or, if it comes to that, a division? How if there is a thing which you alone can do? Not
some *embusqué* business in an office, but a thing compared to which your fight at Loos was a Sunday-school picnic. You are not afraid of danger? Well, in this job you would not be fighting with an army around you, but alone. You are fond of tackling difficulties? Well, I can give you a task which will try all your powers. Have you anything to say?'
My heart was beginning to thump uncomfortably. Sir Walter was not the man to pitch a case too high.
'I am a soldier,' I said, 'and under orders.'
'True; but what I am about to propose does not come by any conceivable stretch within the scope of a soldier's duties. I shall perfectly understand if you decline. You will be acting as I should act myself—as any sane man would. I would not press you for worlds. If you wish it, I will not even make the proposal, but let you go here and now, and wish you good luck with your battalion. I do not wish to perplex a good soldier with impossible decisions.'
This piqued me and put me on my mettle.
'I am not going to run away before the guns fire. Let me hear what you propose.'
Sir Walter crossed to a cabinet, unlocked it with a key from

his chain, and took a piece of paper from a drawer. It looked like an ordinary half-sheet of note-paper.
'I take it,' he said, that your travels have not extended to the East.'
'No,' I said, 'barring a shooting trip in East Africa.'
'Have you by any chance been following the present campaign there?'
'I've read the newspapers pretty regularly since I went to hospital. I've got some pals in the Mesopotamia show, and of course I'm keen to know what is going to happen at Gallipoli and Salonika. I gather that Egypt is pretty safe.'
'If you will give me your attention for ten minutes I will supplement your newspaper reading.'
Sir Walter lay back in an arm-chair and spoke to the ceiling. It was the best story, the clearest and the fullest, I had ever got of any bit of the war. He told me just how and why and when Turkey had left the rails. I heard about her grievances over our seizure of her ironclads, of the mischief the coming of the *Goeben* had wrought, of Enver and his precious Committee and the way they had got a cinch on the old Turk. When he had spoken for a bit, he began to question me.
'You are an intelligent fellow, and you will ask how a Polish adventurer, meaning Enver, and a collection of Jews and gipsies should have got control of a proud race. The ordinary man will tell you that it was German organization backed up with German money and German arms. You will inquire again how, since Turkey is primarily a religious power, Islam has played so small a part in it all. The Sheikh-ul-Islam is neglected, and though the Kaiser proclaims a Holy War and calls himself Hadji Mohammed Guilliamo, and says the Hohenzollerns are descended from the Prophet, that seems to have fallen pretty flat. The ordinary man again will answer that Islam in Turkey is becoming a back number, and that Krupp guns are the new gods. Yet— I don't know. I do not quite believe in Islam

becoming a back number.'
'Look at it in another way,' he went on. 'if it were Enver and Germany alone dragging Turkey into a European war for purposes that no Turk cared a rush about, we might expect to find the regular army obedient, and Constantinople. But in the provinces, where Islam is strong, there would be trouble. Many of us counted on that. But we have been disappointed. The Syrian army is as fanatical as the hordes of the Mahdi. The Senussi have taken a hand in the game. The Persian Moslems are threatening trouble. There is a dry wind blowing through the East, and the parched grasses wait the spark. And that wind is blowing towards the Indian border. Whence comes that wind, think you?'
Sir Walter had lowered his voice and was speaking very slow and distinct. I could hear the rain dripping from the eaves of the window, and far off the hoot of taxis in Whitehall.
'Have you an explanation, Hannay?' he asked again.
'It looks as if Islam had a bigger hand in the thing than we thought,' I said. 'I fancy religion is the only thing to knit up such a scattered empire.'
'You are right,' he said. 'You must be right. We have laughed at the Holy War, the jihad that old Von der Goltz prophesied. But I believe that stupid old man with the big spectacles was right. There is a jihad preparing. The question is, How?'
'I'm hanged if I know,' I said; 'but I'll bet it won't be done by a pack of stout German officers in Pickelhauben. I fancy you can't manufacture Holy Wars out of Krupp guns alone and a few staff officers and a battle cruiser with her boilers burst.'
'Agreed. They are not fools, however much we try to persuade ourselves of the contrary. But supposing they had got some tremendous sacred sanction—some holy thing, some book or gospel or some new prophet from the desert, something which would cast over the whole ugly

mechanism of German war the glamour of the old torrential raids which crumpled the Byzantine Empire and shook the walls of Vienna? Islam is a fighting creed, and the mullah still stands in the pulpit with the Koran in one hand and a drawn sword in the other. Supposing there is some Ark of the Covenant which will madden the remotest Moslem peasant with dreams of Paradise? What then, my friend?'
'Then there will be hell let loose in those parts pretty soon.'
'Hell which may spread. Beyond Persia, remember, lies India.'
'You keep to suppositions. How much do you know?' I asked.
'Very little, except the fact. But the fact is beyond dispute. I have reports from agents everywhere—pedlars in South Russia, Afghan horse-dealers, Turcoman merchants, pilgrims on the road to Mecca, sheikhs in North Africa, sailors on the Black Sea coasters, sheep-skinned Mongols, Hindu fakirs, Greek traders in the Gulf, as well as respectable Consuls who use cyphers. They tell the same story. The East is waiting for a revelation. It has been promised one. Some star—man, prophecy, or trinket—is coming out of the West. The Germans know, and that is the card with which they are going to astonish the world.'
'And the mission you spoke of for me is to go and find out?'
He nodded gravely. 'That is the crazy and impossible mission.'
'Tell me one thing, Sir Walter,' I said. 'I know it is the fashion in this country if a man has a special knowledge to set him to some job exactly the opposite. I know all about Damaraland, but instead of being put on Botha's staff, as I applied to be, I was kept in Hampshire mud till the campaign in German South West Africa was over. I know a man who could pass as an Arab, but do you think they would send him to the East? They left him in my battalion—a lucky thing for me, for he saved my life at Loos. I know the fashion, but isn't this just carrying it a bit too far?

There must be thousands of men who have spent years in the East and talk any language. They're the fellows for this job. I never saw a Turk in my life except a chap who did wrestling turns in a show at Kimberley. You've picked about the most useless man on earth.'
'You've been a mining engineer, Hannay,' Sir Walter said. 'If you wanted a man to prospect for gold in Barotseland you would of course like to get one who knew the country and the people and the language. But the first thing you would require in him would be that he had a nose for finding gold and knew his business. That is the position now. I believe that you have a nose for finding out what our enemies try to hide. I know that you are brave and cool and resourceful. That is why I tell you the story. Besides... '
He unrolled a big map of Europe on the wall.
'I can't tell you where you'll get on the track of the secret, but I can put a limit to the quest. You won't find it east of the Bosporus—not yet. It is still in Europe. It may be in Constantinople, or in Thrace. It may be farther west. But it is moving eastwards. If you are in time you may cut into its march to Constantinople. That much I can tell you. The secret is known in Germany, too, to those whom it concerns. It is in Europe that the seeker must search—at present.'
'Tell me more,' I said. 'You can give me no details and no instructions. Obviously you can give me no help if I come to grief.'
He nodded. 'You would be beyond the pale.'
'You give me a free hand.'
'Absolutely. You can have what money you like, and you can get what help you like. You can follow any plan you fancy, and go anywhere you think fruitful. We can give no directions.'
'One last question. You say it is important. Tell me just how important.'
'It is life and death,' he said solemnly. 'I can put it no higher

and no lower. Once we know what is the menace we can meet it. As long as we are in the dark it works unchecked and we may be too late. The war must be won or lost in Europe. Yes; but if the East blazes up, our effort will be distracted from Europe and the great *coup* may fail. The stakes are no less than victory and defeat, Hannay.'

I got out of my chair and walked to the window. It was a difficult moment in my life. I was happy in my soldiering; above all, happy in the company of my brother officers. I was asked to go off into the enemy's lands on a quest for which I believed I was manifestly unfitted—a business of lonely days and nights, of nerve-racking strain, of deadly peril shrouding me like a garment. Looking out on the bleak weather I shivered. It was too grim a business, too inhuman for flesh and blood. But Sir Walter had called it a matter of life and death, and I had told him that I was out to serve my country. He could not give me orders, but was I not under orders— higher orders than my Brigadier's? I thought myself incompetent, but cleverer men than me thought me competent, or at least competent enough for a sporting chance. I knew in my soul that if I declined I should never be quite at peace in the world again. And yet Sir Walter had called the scheme madness, and said that he himself would never have accepted.

How does one make a great decision? I swear that when I turned round to speak I meant to refuse. But my answer was Yes, and I had crossed the Rubicon. My voice sounded cracked and far away.

Sir Walter shook hands with me and his eyes blinked a little.

'I may be sending you to your death, Hannay—Good God, what a damned task-mistress duty is!—If so, I shall be haunted with regrets, but you will never repent. Have no fear of that. You have chosen the roughest road, but it goes straight to the hill-tops.'

He handed me the half-sheet of note-paper. On it were

written three words—'*Kasredin*', '*cancer*', and '*v. I.*'
'That is the only clue we possess,' he said. 'I cannot construe it, but I can tell you the story. We have had our agents working in Persia and Mesopotamia for years—mostly young officers of the Indian Army. They carry their lives in their hands, and now and then one disappears, and the sewers of Baghdad might tell a tale. But they find out many things, and they count the game worth the candle. They have told us of the star rising in the West, but they could give us no details. All but one—the best of them. He had been working between Mosul and the Persian frontier as a muleteer, and had been south into the Bakhtiari hills. He found out something, but his enemies knew that he knew and he was pursued. Three months ago, just before Kut, he staggered into Delamain's camp with ten bullet holes in him and a knife slash on his forehead. He mumbled his name, but beyond that and the fact that there was a Something coming from the West he told them nothing. He died in ten minutes. They found this paper on him, and since he cried out the word "Kasredin" in his last moments, it must have had something to do with his quest. It is for you to find out if it has any meaning.'
I folded it up and placed it in my pocket-book.
'What a great fellow! What was his name?' I asked.
Sir Walter did not answer at once. He was looking out of the window. 'His name,' he said at last, 'was Harry Bullivant. He was my son. God rest his brave soul!'

CHAPTER 2

THE GATHERING OF THE MISSIONARIES

I wrote out a wire to Sandy, asking him to come up by the two-fifteen train and meet me at my flat.
'I have chosen my colleague,' I said.
'Billy Arbuthnot's boy? His father was at Harrow with me. I know the fellow—Harry used to bring him down to fish—tallish, with a lean, high-boned face and a pair of brown eyes like a pretty girl's. I know his record, too. There's a good deal about him in this office. He rode through Yemen, which no white man ever did before. The Arabs let him pass, for they thought him stark mad and argued that the hand of Allah was heavy enough on him without their efforts. He's blood-brother to every kind of Albanian bandit. Also he used to take a hand in Turkish politics, and got a huge reputation. Some Englishman was once complaining to old Mahmoud Shevkat about the scarcity of statesmen in Western Europe, and Mahmoud broke in with, "Have you not the Honourable Arbuthnot?" You say he's in your battalion. I was wondering what had become of him, for we tried to get hold of him here, but he had left no address. Ludovick Arbuthnot—yes, that's the man. Buried deep in the commissioned ranks of the New Army? Well, we'll get him out pretty quick!'
'I knew he had knocked about the East, but I didn't know he was that kind of swell. Sandy's not the chap to buck about himself.'
'He wouldn't,' said Sir Walter. 'He had always a more than Oriental reticence. I've got another colleague for you, if you like him.'

He looked at his watch. 'You can get to the Savoy Grill Room in five minutes in a taxi-cab. Go in from the Strand, turn to your left, and you will see in the alcove on the right-hand side a table with one large American gentleman sitting at it. They know him there, so he will have the table to himself. I want you to go and sit down beside him. Say you come from me. His name is Mr John Scantlebury Blenkiron, now a citizen of Boston, Mass., but born and raised in Indiana. Put this envelope in your pocket, but don't read its contents till you have talked to him. I want you to form your own opinion about Mr Blenkiron.' I went out of the Foreign Office in as muddled a frame of mind as any diplomatist who ever left its portals. I was most desperately depressed. To begin with, I was in a complete funk. I had always thought I was about as brave as the average man, but there's courage and courage, and mine was certainly not the impassive kind. Stick me down in a trench and I could stand being shot at as well as most people, and my blood could get hot if it were given a chance. But I think I had too much imagination. I couldn't shake off the beastly forecasts that kept crowding my mind. In about a fortnight, I calculated, I would be dead. Shot as a spy— a rotten sort of ending! At the moment I was quite safe, looking for a taxi in the middle of Whitehall, but the sweat broke on my forehead. I felt as I had felt in my adventure before the war. But this was far worse, for it was more cold-blooded and premeditated, and I didn't seem to have even a sporting chance. I watched the figures in khaki passing on the pavement, and thought what a nice safe prospect they had compared to mine. Yes, even if next week they were in the Hohenzollern, or the Hairpin trench at the Quarries, or that ugly angle at Hooge. I wondered why I had not been happier that morning before I got that infernal wire. Suddenly all the trivialities of English life seemed to me inexpressibly dear and terribly far away. I was very angry with Bullivant, till I remembered how fair

he had been. My fate was my own choosing.
When I was hunting the Black Stone the interest of the problem had helped to keep me going. But now I could see no problem. My mind had nothing to work on but three words of gibberish on a sheet of paper and a mystery of which Sir Walter had been convinced, but to which he couldn't give a name. It was like the story I had read of Saint Teresa setting off at the age of ten with her small brother to convert the Moors. I sat huddled in the taxi with my chin on my breast, wishing that I had lost a leg at Loos and been comfortably tucked away for the rest of the war.
Sure enough I found my man in the Grill Room. There he was, feeding solemnly, with a napkin tucked under his chin. He was a big fellow with a fat, sallow, clean-shaven face. I disregarded the hovering waiter and pulled up a chair beside the American at the little table. He turned on me a pair of full sleepy eyes, like a ruminating ox.
'Mr Blenkiron?' I asked.
'You have my name, Sir,' he said. 'Mr John Scantlebury Blenkiron. I would wish you good morning if I saw anything good in this darned British weather.'
'I come from Sir Walter Bullivant,' I said, speaking low.
'So?' said he. 'Sir Walter is a very good friend of mine. Pleased to meet you, Mr—or I guess it's Colonel—'
'Hannay,' I said; 'Major Hannay.' I was wondering what this sleepy Yankee could do to help me.
'Allow me to offer you luncheon, Major. Here, waiter, bring the carte. I regret that I cannot join you in sampling the efforts of the management of this ho-tel. I suffer, Sir, from dyspepsia—duo-denal dyspepsia. It gets me two hours after a meal and gives me hell just below the breast-bone. So I am obliged to adopt a diet. My nourishment is fish, Sir, and boiled milk and a little dry toast. It's a melancholy descent from the days when I could do justice to a lunch at Sherry's and sup off oyster-crabs and devilled bones.' He sighed from the depths of his capacious frame.

I ordered an omelette and a chop, and took another look at him. The large eyes seemed to be gazing steadily at me without seeing me. They were as vacant as an abstracted child's; but I had an uncomfortable feeling that they saw more than mine.

'You have been fighting, Major? The Battle of Loos? Well, I guess that must have been some battle. We in America respect the fighting of the British soldier, but we don't quite catch on to the de-vices of the British Generals. We opine that there is more bellicosity than science among your highbrows. That is so? My father fought at Chattanooga, but these eyes have seen nothing gorier than a Presidential election. Say, is there any way I could be let into a scene of real bloodshed?'

His serious tone made me laugh. 'There are plenty of your countrymen in the present show,' I said. 'The French Foreign Legion is full of young Americans, and so is our Army Service Corps. Half the chauffeurs you strike in France seem to come from the States.'

He sighed. 'I did think of some belligerent stunt a year back. But I reflected that the good God had not given John S. Blenkiron the kind of martial figure that would do credit to the tented field. Also I recollected that we Americans were nootrals—benevolent nootrals—and that it did not become me to be butting into the struggles of the effete monarchies of Europe. So I stopped at home. It was a big renunciation, Major, for I was lying sick during the Philippines business, and I have never seen the lawless passions of men let loose on a battlefield. And, as a stoodent of humanity, I hankered for the experience.'

'What have you been doing?' I asked. The calm gentleman had begun to interest me. 'Waal,' he said, 'I just waited. The Lord has blessed me with money to burn, so I didn't need to go scrambling like a wild cat for war contracts. But I reckoned I would get let into the game somehow, and I was. Being a nootral, I was in an advantageous position to take a

hand. I had a pretty hectic time for a while, and then I reckoned I would leave God's country and see what was doing in Europe. I have counted myself out of the bloodshed business, but, as your poet sings, peace has its victories not less renowned than war, and I reckon that means that a nootral can have a share in a scrap as well as a belligerent.'

'That's the best kind of neutrality I've ever heard of,' I said.

'It's the right kind,' he replied solemnly. 'Say, Major, what are your lot fighting for? For your own skins and your Empire and the peace of Europe. Waal, those ideals don't concern us one cent. We're not Europeans, and there aren't any German trenches on Long Island yet. You've made the ring in Europe, and if we came butting in it wouldn't be the rules of the game. You wouldn't welcome us, and I guess you'd be right. We're that delicate-minded we can't interfere and that was what my friend, President Wilson, meant when he opined that America was too proud to fight. So we're nootrals. But likewise we're benevolent nootrals. As I follow events, there's a skunk been let loose in the world, and the odour of it is going to make life none too sweet till it is cleared away. It wasn't us that stirred up that skunk, but we've got to take a hand in disinfecting the planet. See? We can't fight, but, by God! some of us are going to sweat blood to sweep the mess up. Officially we do nothing except give off Notes like a leaky boiler gives off steam. But as individooal citizens we're in it up to the neck. So, in the spirit of Jefferson Davis and Woodrow Wilson, I'm going to be the nootralest kind of nootral till Kaiser will be sorry he didn't declare war on America at the beginning.'

I was completely recovering my temper. This fellow was a perfect jewel, and his spirit put purpose into me.

'I guess you British were the same kind of nootral when your Admiral warned off the German fleet from interfering with Dewey in Manila Bay in '98.' Mr Blenkiron drank up the last drop of his boiled milk and lit a thin black cigar.

I leaned forward. 'Have you talked to Sir Walter?' I asked.
'I have talked to him, and he has given me to understand that there's a deal ahead which you're going to boss. There are no flies on that big man, and if he says it's good business then you can count me in.'
'You know that it's uncommonly dangerous?'
'I judged so. But it don't do to begin counting risks. I believe in an all-wise and beneficent Providence, but you have got to trust Him and give Him a chance. What's life anyhow? For me, it's living on a strict diet and having frequent pains in my stomach. It isn't such an almighty lot to give up, provided you get a good price in the deal. Besides, how big is the risk? About one o'clock in the morning, when you can't sleep, it will be the size of Mount Everest, but if you run out to meet it, it will be a hillock you can jump over. The grizzly looks very fierce when you're taking your ticket for the Rockies and wondering if you'll come back, but he's just an ordinary bear when you've got the sight of your rifle on him. I won't think about risks till I'm up to my neck in them and don't see the road out.'
I scribbled my address on a piece of paper and handed it to the stout philosopher. 'Come to dinner tonight at eight,' I said.
'I thank you, Major. A little fish, please, plain-boiled, and some hot milk. You will forgive me if I borrow your couch after the meal and spend the evening on my back. That is the advice of my noo doctor.'
I got a taxi and drove to my club. On the way I opened the envelope Sir Walter had given me. It contained a number of jottings, the dossier of Mr Blenkiron. He had done wonders for the Allies in the States. He had nosed out the Dumba plot, and had been instrumental in getting the portfolio of Dr Albert. Von Papen's spies had tried to murder him, after he had defeated an attempt to blow up one of the big gun factories. Sir Walter had written at the end: 'The best man we ever had. Better than Scudder. He would go through

hell with a box of bismuth tablets and a pack of Patience cards.'

I went into the little back smoking-room, borrowed an atlas from the library, poked up the fire, and sat down to think. Mr Blenkiron had given me the fillip I needed. My mind was beginning to work now, and was running wide over the whole business. Not that I hoped to find anything by my cogitations. It wasn't thinking in an arm-chair that would solve the mystery. But I was getting a sort of grip on a plan of operations. And to my relief I had stopped thinking about the risks. Blenkiron had shamed me out of that. If a sedentary dyspeptic could show that kind of nerve, I wasn't going to be behind him.

I went back to my flat about five o'clock. My man Paddock had gone to the wars long ago, so I had shifted to one of the new blocks in Park Lane where they provide food and service. I kept the place on to have a home to go to when I got leave. It's a miserable business holidaying in an hotel. Sandy was devouring tea-cakes with the serious resolution of a convalescent.

'Well, Dick, what's the news? Is it a brass hat or the boot?'

'Neither,' I said. 'But you and I are going to disappear from His Majesty's forces. Seconded for special service.'

'O my sainted aunt!' said Sandy. 'What is it? For Heaven's sake put me out of pain. Have we to tout deputations of suspicious neutrals over munition works or take the shivering journalist in a motor-car where he can imagine he sees a Boche?'

'The news will keep. But I can tell you this much. It's about as safe and easy as to go through the German lines with a walking-stick.'

'Come, that's not so dusty,' said Sandy, and began cheerfully on the muffins.

I must spare a moment to introduce Sandy to the reader, for he cannot be allowed to slip into this tale by a side-door. If you will consult the Peerage you will find that to Edward

Cospatrick, fifteenth Baron Clanroyden, there was born in the year 1882, as his second son, Ludovick Gustavus Arbuthnot, commonly called the Honourable, etc. The said son was educated at Eton and New College, Oxford, was a captain in the Tweeddale Yeomanry, and served for some years as honorary attaché at various embassies. The Peerage will stop short at this point, but that is by no means the end of the story. For the rest you must consult very different authorities. Lean brown men from the ends of the earth may be seen on the London pavements now and then in creased clothes, walking with the light outland step, slinking into clubs as if they could not remember whether or not they belonged to them. From them you may get news of Sandy. Better still, you will hear of him at little forgotten fishing ports where the Albanian mountains dip to the Adriatic. If you struck a Mecca pilgrimage the odds are you would meet a dozen of Sandy's friends in it. In shepherds' huts in the Caucasus you will find bits of his cast-off clothing, for he has a knack of shedding garments as he goes. In the caravanserais of Bokhara and Samarkand he is known, and there are shikaris in the Pamirs who still speak of him round their fires. If you were going to visit Petrograd or Rome or Cairo it would be no use asking him for introductions; if he gave them, they would lead you into strange haunts. But if Fate compelled you to go to Llasa or Yarkand or Seistan he could map out your road for you and pass the word to potent friends. We call ourselves insular, but the truth is that we are the only race on earth that can produce men capable of getting inside the skin of remote peoples. Perhaps the Scots are better than the English, but we're all a thousand per cent better than anybody else. Sandy was the wandering Scot carried to the pitch of genius. In old days he would have led a crusade or discovered a new road to the Indies. Today he merely roamed as the spirit moved him, till the war swept him up and dumped him down in my battalion.

I got out Sir Walter's half-sheet of note-paper. It was not the original—naturally he wanted to keep that—but it was a careful tracing. I took it that Harry Bullivant had not written down the words as a memo for his own use. People who follow his career have good memories. He must have written them in order that, if he perished and his body was found, his friends might get a clue. Wherefore, I argued, the words must be intelligible to somebody or other of our persuasion, and likewise they must be pretty well gibberish to any Turk or German that found them.

The first, '*Kasredin*', I could make nothing of. I asked Sandy.

'You mean Nasr-ed-din,' he said, still munching crumpets.

'What's that?' I asked sharply. 'He's the General believed to be commanding against us in Mesopotamia. I remember him years ago in Aleppo. He talked bad French and drank the sweetest of sweet champagne.'

I looked closely at the paper. The 'K' was unmistakable.

'Kasredin is nothing. It means in Arabic the House of Faith, and might cover anything from Hagia Sofia to a suburban villa. What's your next puzzle, Dick? Have you entered for a prize competition in a weekly paper?'

'*Cancer,*' I read out.

'It is the Latin for a crab. Likewise it is the name of a painful disease. it is also a sign of the Zodiac.'

'*V. I,*' I read.

'There you have me. It sounds like the number of a motor-car. The police would find out for you. I call this rather a difficult competition. What's the prize?'

I passed him the paper. 'Who wrote it? It looks as if he had been in a hurry.'

'Harry Bullivant,' I said.

Sandy's face grew solemn. 'Old Harry. He was at my tutor's. The best fellow God ever made. I saw his name in the casualty list before Kut... Harry didn't do things without a purpose. What's the story of this paper?'

'Wait till after dinner,' I said. 'I'm going to change and have a bath. There's an American coming to dine, and he's part of the business.'

Mr Blenkiron arrived punctual to the minute in a fur coat like a Russian prince's. Now that I saw him on his feet I could judge him better. He had a fat face, but was not too plump in figure, and very muscular wrists showed below his shirt-cuffs. I fancied that, if the occasion called, he might be a good man with his hands.

Sandy and I ate a hearty meal, but the American picked at his boiled fish and sipped his milk a drop at a time. When the servant had cleared away, he was as good as his word and laid himself out on my sofa. I offered him a good cigar, but he preferred one of his own lean black abominations. Sandy stretched his length in an easy chair and lit his pipe. 'Now for your story, Dick,' he said.

I began, as Sir Walter had begun with me, by telling them about the puzzle in the Near East. I pitched a pretty good yarn, for I had been thinking a lot about it, and the mystery of the business had caught my fancy. Sandy got very keen.

'It is possible enough. Indeed, I've been expecting it, though I'm hanged if I can imagine what card the Germans have got up their sleeve. It might be any one of twenty things. Thirty years ago there was a bogus prophecy that played the devil in Yemen. Or it might be a flag such as Ali Wad Helu had, or a jewel like Solomon's necklace in Abyssinia. You never know what will start off a jihad! But I rather think it's a man.'

'Where could he get his purchase?' I asked.

'It's hard to say. If it were merely wild tribesmen like the Bedouin he might have got a reputation as a saint and miracle-worker. Or he might be a fellow that preached a pure religion, like the chap that founded the Senussi. But I'm inclined to think he must be something extra special if he can put a spell on the whole Moslem world. The Turk and the Persian wouldn't follow the ordinary new theology

game. He must be of the Blood. Your Mahdis and Mullahs and Imams were nobodies, but they had only a local prestige. To capture all Islam—and I gather that is what we fear—the man must be of the Koreish, the tribe of the Prophet himself.'
'But how could any impostor prove that? For I suppose he's an impostor.'
'He would have to combine a lot of claims. His descent must be pretty good to begin with, and there are families, remember, that claim the Koreish blood. Then he'd have to be rather a wonder on his own account— saintly, eloquent, and that sort of thing. And I expect he'd have to show a sign, though what that could be I haven't a notion.'
'You know the East about as well as any living man. Do you think that kind of thing is possible?' I asked.
'Perfectly,' said Sandy, with a grave face.
'Well, there's the ground cleared to begin with. Then there's the evidence of pretty well every secret agent we possess. That all seems to prove the fact. But we have no details and no clues except that bit of paper.' I told them the story of it.
Sandy studied it with wrinkled brows. 'It beats me. But it may be the key for all that. A clue may be dumb in London and shout aloud at Baghdad.'
'That's just the point I was coming to. Sir Walter says this thing is about as important for our cause as big guns. He can't give me orders, but he offers the job of going out to find what the mischief is. Once he knows that, he says he can checkmate it. But it's got to be found out soon, for the mine may be sprung at any moment. I've taken on the job. Will you help?'
Sandy was studying the ceiling.
'I should add that it's about as safe as playing chuck-farthing at the Loos Cross-roads, the day you and I went in. And if we fail nobody can help us.'
'Oh, of course, of course,' said Sandy in an abstracted

voice.
Mr Blenkiron, having finished his after-dinner recumbency, had sat up and pulled a small table towards him. From his pocket he had taken a pack of Patience cards and had begun to play the game called the Double Napoleon. He seemed to be oblivious of the conversation.
Suddenly I had a feeling that the whole affair was stark lunacy. Here were we three simpletons sitting in a London flat and projecting a mission into the enemy's citadel without an idea what we were to do or how we were to do it. And one of the three was looking at the ceiling, and whistling softly through his teeth, and another was playing Patience. The farce of the thing struck me so keenly that I laughed.
Sandy looked at me sharply.
'You feel like that? Same with me. It's idiocy, but all war is idiotic, and the most whole-hearted idiot is apt to win. We're to go on this mad trail wherever we think we can hit it. Well, I'm with you. But I don't mind admitting that I'm in a blue funk. I had got myself adjusted to this trench business and was quite happy. And now you have hoicked me out, and my feet are cold.'
'I don't believe you know what fear is,' I said.
'There you're wrong, Dick,' he said earnestly. 'Every man who isn't a maniac knows fear. I have done some daft things, but I never started on them without wishing they were over. Once I'm in the show I get easier, and by the time I'm coming out I'm sorry to leave it. But at the start my feet are icy.'
'Then I take it you're coming?'
'Rather,' he said. 'You didn't imagine I would go back on you?'
'And you, sir?' I addressed Blenkiron.
His game of Patience seemed to be coming out. He was completing eight little heaps of cards with a contented grunt. As I spoke, he raised his sleepy eyes and nodded.

'Why, yes,' he said. 'You gentlemen mustn't think that I haven't been following your most engrossing conversation. I guess I haven't missed a syllable. I find that a game of Patience stimulates the digestion after meals and conduces to quiet reflection. John S. Blenkiron is with you all the time.'

He shuffled the cards and dealt for a new game.

I don't think I ever expected a refusal, but this ready assent cheered me wonderfully. I couldn't have faced the thing alone.

'Well, that's settled. Now for ways and means. We three have got to put ourselves in the way of finding out Germany's secret, and we have to go where it is known. Somehow or other we have to reach Constantinople, and to beat the biggest area of country we must go by different roads. Sandy, my lad, you've got to get into Turkey. You're the only one of us that knows that engaging people. You can't get in by Europe very easily, so you must try Asia. What about the coast of Asia Minor?'

'It could be done,' he said. 'You'd better leave that entirely to me. I'll find out the best way. I suppose the Foreign Office will help me to get to the jumping-off place?'

'Remember,' I said, 'it's no good getting too far east. The secret, so far as concerns us, is still west of Constantinople.'

'I see that. I'll blow in on the Bosporus by a short tack.'

'For you, Mr Blenkiron, I would suggest a straight journey. You're an American, and can travel through Germany direct. But I wonder how far your activities in New York will allow you to pass as a neutral?'

'I have considered that, Sir,' he said. 'I have given some thought to the pecooliar psychology of the great German nation. As I read them they're as cunning as cats, and if you play the feline game they will outwit you every time. Yes, Sir, they are no slouches at sleuth-work. If I were to buy a pair of false whiskers and dye my hair and dress like a

Baptist parson and go into Germany on the peace racket, I guess they'd be on my trail like a knife, and I should be shot as a spy inside of a week or doing solitary in the Moabite prison. But they lack the larger vision. They can be bluffed, Sir. With your approval I shall visit the Fatherland as John S. Blenkiron, once a thorn in the side of their brightest boys on the other side. But it will be a different John S. I reckon he will have experienced a change of heart. He will have come to appreciate the great, pure, noble soul of Germany, and he will be sorrowing for his past like a converted gun-man at a camp meeting. He will be a victim of the meanness and perfidy of the British Government. I am going to have a first-class row with your Foreign Office about my passport, and I am going to speak harsh words about them up and down this metropolis. I am going to be shadowed by your sleuths at my port of embarkation, and I guess I shall run up hard against the British Legations in Scandinavia. By that time our Teutonic friends will have begun to wonder what has happened to John S., and to think that maybe they have been mistaken in that child. So, when I get to Germany they will be waiting for me with an open mind. Then I judge my conduct will surprise and encourage them. I will confide to them valuable secret information about British preparations, and I will show up the British lion as the meanest kind of cur. You may trust me to make a good impression. After that I'll move eastwards, to see the demolition of the British Empire in those parts. By the way, where is the rendezvous?'

'This is the 17th day of November. If we can't find out what we want in two months we may chuck the job. On the 17th of January we should forgather in Constantinople. Whoever gets there first waits for the others. If by that date we're not all present, it will be considered that the missing man has got into trouble and must be given up. If ever we get there we'll be coming from different points and in different characters, so we want a rendezvous where all kinds of odd

folk assemble. Sandy, you know Constantinople. You fix the meeting-place.'
'I've already thought of that,' he said, and going to the writing-table he drew a little plan on a sheet of paper. 'That lane runs down from the Kurdish Bazaar in Galata to the ferry of Ratchik. Half-way down on the left-hand side is a café kept by a Greek called Kuprasso. Behind the café is a garden, surrounded by high walls which were parts of the old Byzantine Theatre. At the end of the garden is a shanty called the Garden-house of Suliman the Red. It has been in its time a dancing-hall and a gambling hell and God knows what else. It's not a place for respectable people, but the ends of the earth converge there and no questions are asked. That's the best spot I can think of for a meeting-place.'
The kettle was simmering by the fire, the night was raw, and it seemed the hour for whisky-punch. I made a brew for Sandy and myself and boiled some milk for Blenkiron.
'What about language?' I asked. 'You're all right, Sandy?'
'I know German fairly well; and I can pass anywhere as a Turk. The first will do for eavesdropping and the second for ordinary business.'
'And you?' I asked Blenkiron.
'I was left out at Pentecost,' he said. 'I regret to confess I have no gift of tongues. But the part I have chosen for myself don't require the polyglot. Never forget I'm plain John S. Blenkiron, a citizen of the great American Republic.'
'You haven't told us your own line, Dick,' Sandy said.
'I am going to the Bosporus through Germany, and, not being a neutral, it won't be a very cushioned journey.'
Sandy looked grave.
'That sounds pretty desperate. Is your German good enough?'
'Pretty fair; quite good enough to pass as a native. But officially I shall not understand one word. I shall be a Boer