

Lieutenant Finn's Promotion

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I.

Voyage pénible.

Though he had not bought blood-stained laurels on the stricken field, Colonel Koupets was deservedly the pride of the Gallician army.

He had begun as a lion-hunter in Somaliland, and had a wound a foot long in his thigh which had at least the advantage of acting as a barometer. But on his return grave old Galpotz had hinted that such talent as he had shown for dealing with strange countries and peoples might be turned to better use than sport.

Accordingly Koupets had spent his next leave among the lakes that feed the Red Elin River, and a third expedition brought him to Lake Dahet and Northern Melania, and so to the mouth of the Ognoc.*

His services to the Gallician government, though secret, were recognizable, and Koupets had a free hand, and aid and glory from the national geographic societies. His adventures had been written up by industrious journalists who spared no yellow. He was beginning to be an eponymous hero on the boulevards of his native Tetulia, when he suddenly became the man of mystery—greater, and yet forgotten.

For Koupets disappeared.

He had been last heard of at Lake Dahet. Thence he had plunged into the jungles of Central Kainogenogy, and the silence swallowed him up.

People began to wonder where he was. Newspapers invented reports, one at least with such claim to authenticity as to be based on gossip of a sailor's bar. One paper saw an opportunity, and published the "Terrible

* Erias on the French map.

Tale of Koupet's Last Stand," with faked diaries, faked last messages, and faked photographs complete. Nobody cared much; the editor cut short his feuilleton and began a gorier, while the gloom of the tropical jungle settled over the fate of Koupets. Five years after his disappearance only one girl in all Gallicia, weeping at the grave of her dead mother, still hoped for his return; hardly a hundred ever gave a thought to him.

But the gathered blackness was not night, but storm; it was to break with a flash and a roar to appal the planet.

II.

Colonel Koupets and his eight Gallician brother officers and fourteen soldiers had no intention whatever of going to Adoshaf.

Adoshaf has few charms for anybody, and even if we allow a great deal for eccentricity of taste in a man of Koupet's type, we cannot suppose that he would deliberately go two thousand miles out of his way to get there.

But the traveler in Central Kainogenogy has to reckon with three main matters: savages, jungles and rivers. He consequently provides himself amply with guns, axes and some form of boat. Even so he may get mislaid. Koupets had been about three years on his trail, heading over southeast, when he struck an uncharted river where he least expected it. A lieutenant and four men set out in a boat to cross it, and were swept far down stream. Night fell, and they did not return. In the morning Koupets turned northward to try to pick them up. Towards evening saw the wreck of the boat on a jutting rock in mid-stream.

Koupets continued his northern detour, on a report of a big village with canoes three days' march down stream.

Rumor told truth, but had omitted to mention that the villagers were warlike and bloodthirsty cannibals.

The peaceable overtures of the traveler, who had exhausted his supply of scarlet umbrellas six months earlier, were scornfully rejected.

Koupets mowed down about three hundred of the deputation of protest with a Maxim, and stormed the village at dawn. Unfortunately, the party which he had detached to capture the canoes found itself cut off by a creek full of soft mud. The natives consequently were able to retreat when they saw their huts on fire, and Koupets was no better off for canoes than before.

Prisoners told him of a village of wizards to the north which no man could reach, since (a) the jungle was haunted, (b) there was an impassable river, (c) the road was very bad, (d) the inhabitants, far from being the simple and peaceable folk that informants' martyred tribe was composed of, were incarnate devils. From this Koupets deduced that he would reach it without difficulty in a few days, and meet with a very similar reception.

However, he was wrong. The natives, knowingly or not, failed to find the jungle paths. Koupets was forced more and more to the north, and even to the west. He then struck a friendly village, where every white man went down like a log with fever.

Two months later he made a fresh attempt to reach the river. Succeeding in the end, he found wood suitable for rafts, built them, and cast off. One was overturned, and the doctor, and all his medicines, and all the scientific instruments of the expedition, were lost, as well as a great deal of ammunition. Landing on the opposite bank, the explorer struck a village too big to attack except as a forlorn hope, and little inclined to amity.

The chief, however, proposed an alliance, as he was about to avenge a raid on his northern territory. A year's campaign followed; the enemy, beaten, pleaded that they had been urged to the raid by a fanatical race

of strange complexion, who had invaded them from the north. Koupets, who knew that he was a thousand miles or so off his trail, but, since the loss of his instruments, had no real idea where he was on the map, was almost ready to abandon his main object, and get out anywhere he could. The river, always with them, flowed northward as persistently as the Elin itself might have down. He accepted the new alliance, and marched against the "fanatics of strange complexion"—which he found due to paint and an aged madwoman.

After the pacification of this tribe, he again fell dangerously ill. More of his men died; his resources of every kind were nearly exhausted; it seemed to him a duty to make for the sea as best he could.

He therefore chose the best canoes of his allies and plenty of provisions, which the grateful chief bestowed on him in abundance. A touching farewell was only marred by a gratuitous and perfectly treacherous attack on the part of the aforesaid grateful chief, who had suddenly wakened to the fact that the strangers were going off with valuable property, and that as soon as the farewell was said, the laws of hospitality no longer applied. Koupets had been expecting this, and a shot from his revolver, striking the chief in the diaphragm, threw the natives into confusion, as the majority of the persons present were booked to be buried alive with the fallen chief. A disordered rush was checked by a single volley, and Koupets and his party reached mid-stream without a scratch.

The journey down-stream was as long as it was uneventful, and the party regained a good deal of its lost strength. It was interrupted by a cataract hedged in by so thick a jungle that it was impossible to cut a way for the canoes. The little army, taking to its legs, came out at last upon an open plain, and sighted a distant village that turned out (in the end) to be Adoshaf.

A few miles from Adoshaf Koupets found a number of mutilated corpses, and a dying maniac, from whom

he gleaned no information. A mile further a starving woman told him that the folk of Adoshaf had been exterminated by devils. Two miles from the village the aforesaid devils, perceiving Koupets and his merry men, came out on horseback, with long spears and shrill cries, at the charge.

The wary and resourceful Koupets, who had extended his men in a long line, caused the wings to fall back, and having thus bunched the line of horsemen, unmasked the Maxim and swept them away. The battle was over in three minutes, and an hour later the conquerors were in the market place receiving the submission of the "devils," who had been utterly demoralized by the annihilation of their fiercest fighting men by what appeared to them to be magic.

Koupets was highly elated at his victory, and dreamt of empire. "Glory and Gallicia," said he, "have always been synonymous." And forthwith he set up the Gallician flag in the market-place, unfurled it ceremonially, and took possession of Adoshaf in the name of his country and its government, though, having been seven years lost to civilization, he had no idea what the form of that government might be, and even less of what is ever the last thing a brave man thinks of—the political situation.

III.

Croisième Joyeuse.

First Lieutenant Finn was certainly the only man on his ship to be trusted with the navigation. Balustan does not produce born sailors. Finn was of a conquered race of seafaring folk, and hated Balustan as Moses hated the Egyptians. The Khan of Balustan never suspected that the declaration of war would see half his ships sunk by his own officers.

However, the world was at peace, and First Lieutenant Finn saw a brave show of bunting from the bridge of the battleship "Luschbuze" as she steamed grandly out of the harbor of Sebastian, beneath the muzzles of the biggest fortress guns in the world.

It was a commonplace that Sebastian was impregnable. Though indeed it had once fallen within the memory of living men, conditions of war had changed. It was now-a-days not even approachable. It was said that its arsenal held munitions of war sufficient for a three years' siege.

The "Luschbuze" was a battle-cruiser of the latest pattern, and her armament was superior to that of any other ship in the world. She had been in commission for not quite a year, and hoisted the pennant of Rear Admiral Tsoke. In her bunkers were 3,000 tons of the best English steam coal, and her orders were to cruise in the Axine until it was exhausted.

Landsmen have the fixed idea that cruising has something of *dolce far niente* in its constitution. They think of the Norfolk Broads, or Dr. Lunn's pleasure parties. But the cruise of a battleship is hard work, the next best thing to action—and hard work formed no portion of the program of Rear Admiral Tsoke. That gallant seaman—the "Nelson of the North" of English newspapers—accordingly steamed out of sight of land, and out of touch of ships, and there by night incontinently emptied two of his three thousand tons of coal into the stormy Axine.*

This tedious but necessary labor ended. the ward-room returned to its untiring round of baccarat and strong drink, while the Cinderella of the ship, First Lieutenant Finn, went ahead—dead slow—to the convenient harbor of an island most highly favored by nature, where the hardships of naval discipline might be deservedly mitigated by the amenities of social intercourse with a race whose ladies were renowned throughout three continents for their virtues rather than for their virtue.

* Improbable statements occurring in this story are facts for which I can give chapter and verse.—A. C.

It was here that the first ray of the star of First Lieutenant Finn's destiny lit his horizon. "I shall have to go and blow those poor devils out of the water, I see," said Rear Admiral Tsoke, in an expansive manner, to his lieutenant.

"Yes, sir?" interrogatively.

"The brave Koupets has come out at Adoshaf, and raised the banner of Galicia. See there!" and he handed across a copy of the Balustran "New Times."

They drank to Koupets the brave, and to Galicia the glorious, their ally, and heartily wished to God they were in Tetulia, where the girls are gladdest. They also drank the deepest of damnations to treacherous Noibla, the country that had made forcible diplomatic protest against the seizure of Adoshaf, and with a jabber—unintelligible, thank God, to bluff, hardy, honest seamen!—about "spheres of influence" and the like, they raised a little hell in the chancelleries.

There was, however, no anxiety in the simple mind of First Lieutenant Finn. He never expected promotion having no noble relatives, or even a wealthy lady to interest herself in his career. He knew that war would not come, on the general principle that "nothing ever happens." If it did, he conceived it his first duty to God and man to run the "Luschbuze" upon such a rock and in such weather that so much as a splinter of her would never be seen again.

It was the last day of their stay in the island. Tsoke, thinking that the fleet might be mobilized and sent somewhere in such a way that he would have to do something, resolved to lose himself in the Axine until the crisis was over. He hastily got to sea, and cruised about for a fortnight in a choppy temper, which increased upon him daily, the weather becoming and remaining exceedingly bad, and his luck at baccarat worse.

At the end of that period he spoke a British ship, two fays out from Sebastion, learned that the crises was ended peacefully, and, longing for the flesh-pots of the

arsenal, got rid of another 500 tons of coal in the night, and ordered Finn to lay a straight course for Sebastion, where he arrived without further adventure.

With a sense of duty done, the Nelson of the North lay to, and went off in a boat with his captain to dinner. No sooner were they landed, however, than the naval police quietly arrested them, and lodged them in separate cells furnished with ample stationery and such other adjuncts to the art of writing as a paternal government deemed fitting for their rank.

IV.

Alarms and Excursions.

It was a serious annoyance to the government of Gallicia that the contents of Colonel Koupets' despatches—forwarded from Adoshaf by special runners—could not have been suppressed a fortnight before their receipt. The facts, reiterated with constantly accelerated wealth of detail, were in every newspaper, and the official dementis grew weaker and weaker. The embassies alone remained officially ignorant of the most startling development of the century. Koupets had blundered into a peaceful powder factory with a Roman candle in full blast.

When he last left Gallicia, the republican government had been extremely popular, and Adoshaf had barely been discovered. During his enforced retirement from clubs and tape telegraphs, the said government had been found out. Singly and collectively, nearly every member of the parliament had robbed the nation wholesale in a way quite apart from the ordinary methods of political graft. It was plain swindling, and its apologists themselves could find no other word for it, but contented themselves with trying to find scapegoats. Several governments fell in quick succession, each being as

tainted as its predecessors, the fact becoming more and more conspicuous as its members entered the limelight of office. A great genius—the prince of the thieves—had latterly managed to turn the tables for a moment by unearthing at prodigious cost a most unsavory scandal against the enemies of the republican form of government, who became daily more numerous and powerful. Most fortunately some six dynasties claimed the crown of Gallicia, and their internecine struggles kept the republic erect though staggering.

A further complication had arisen with regard to Adoshaf. A great diplomatic victory had been won, and a great war averted; and one of the conditions of peace was the recognition of the Elin valley—Adoshaf is on the Elin, though Koupets had no idea of the fact for months afterwards! as within the “sphere of influence” of Noibla the treacherous and hereditary enemy of Gallicia.

And here was the government looking out of its governmental windows and seeing the streets ablaze with enthusiasm and ringing with the cry of “Krets Koupets” (Long live Koupets!), while it had not even received the explorer’s despatches, and could only wish that he had perished long ago in Central Kainogenogy. It could not even disown Koupets to the ambassador of Noibla. It could only deny that anything had occurred. And at any moment one of the six pretenders might take it into his head to telegraph “Krets Koupets,” (Long live Koupets!) to a royalist newspaper sneak in disguise into Tetulia, and upset the republican apple-cart for a generation.

When the despatches at last arrived, the situation touched boiling point. Royalist deputies insisted on their being read in parliament, and with a mob of about a million people thronging the parliament square, chanting “Krets Koupets!” hour by hour in formidable unison, the government could not refuse.

The house went mad with excitement. Koupets in his elation had been singularly positive and eloquent.

"Light of civilization in darkest Kainogenogy," "Slavery abolished," "Fanaticism disarmed." and above all, "The flag of Gallicia and glory set up in the metropolis of barbarism."

The government tried to proceed to the order of the day. It was in vain. "Krets Koupets" resounded inside the house as well as outside. The premier of the government that had fallen only a month earlier mounted the tribune, his vengeance irresistibly in his hand. He compelled the house to silence. He was very sorry, he said, he was above all a man of moderation. He would be the last to injure a friendly nation such as Noibla. But the flag of Gallicia had been set up in the marketplace of Adoshaf, and where that flag had once floated, who dared pull it down? Not while he lived, or any Gallician worthy of the fatherland.

The government were thunderstruck at this diabolical moderation. Chauvinism they could sneer at; this was unanswerable. They resorted to obstruction. Speaker after speaker mounted the tribune; each exhausted himself in the effort to glorify Koupets and say nothing compromising. These tactics triumphed; the debate stood adjourned. The premier returned to the foreign office with the minister of external affairs—to find what was, in fact, though not in name, an ultimatum from Noibla.

They stood on a crazy pinnacle. Disown Koupets, and they would be lucky if the people did not tear them limb from limb; acknowledge him, and war would follow within forty-eight hours. Dared they fight? They drove to the house of the Minister for the Navy, and pulled him out of bed. The first point of attack would be their great arsenal at Nolout, and the fleet of Noibla lay stripped at Atlam, not a day and a half away.

Was everything ready down to the last gaiter button?

The minister dared not give an official reply. Instead, he had the line cleared, and went to Nolout on a light engine.

An hour's inspection told him everything. There was no shortage of gaiter buttons, but of the more serious munitions of war there was a most surprising dearth. There was no ammunition for the heavy guns. There were no mines. There was not ten per cent. of the shell that should have been. There were insufficient torpedoes to put half the craft in the harbor on a war footing. Miracles apart, Nolout must fall within three days of a declaration of war. The minister's telegram to his colleague was terse Gallician for "peace at any price."

He remained in Nolout to organize courts-martial on an unprecedented scale, and to escape the fury of the Tetulian mob.

With the fate of the government we have no concern; with the attitude of Balustan we have. The ambassador of that country represented to the foreign minister that a climb-down so ignominious on the part of an ally was a blow to the prestige of his own country.

"My dear ambassador," said the minister in a temper unrestrained by any fear of consequences, since in any case he must fall that day, and for ever, "we can't fight Noibla without ships, and from all I learn the only wonder is that our chaps didn't try to sell the navy as a going concern."

The ambassador, expressing a few apt words of polite sympathy, retired, and sent his most confidential attaché with despatches to the Khan. It might be as well, he opined with deference, to take stock at the arsenal of Sebastion.

The Khan acted on his advice, and found the words of one of the minor prophets about the locust and the grasshopper and the palmer-worm and the canker-worm to be strictly applicable to the situation at Sebastion. The place was a husk; there were not a week's munitions in it.

The Khan ordered the arrest of every officer above the rank of commander. They were put in cells under sentries, furnished with writing materials, and informed that doubtless they would furnish a perfectly satisfactory explanation of the disappearance of some millions of pounds' worth of war stores; but if not (by chance) they would find loaded revolvers in the room opposite.

At this moment the "Luschbuze" entered the harbor, and two more were added to the bag.

That night every one of the culprits shot himself; during the next six months they were officially killed off. "Admiral A., promoted, died of heart disease while traveling to take over his new command." "Captain B., absent on leave, was thrown from his automobile and killed." "Rear Admiral C. died of an operation following appendicitis." "Captain D. drowned at sea while attempting to save the life of a sailor who had fallen overboard," and so on—and First Lieutenant Finn commanded the "Luschbuze."

KEY.

Koupets is the Russian word for merchant. Marchand (Major). Elin, Nile. Dachet, Tchad. Ognoc, Congo. Eriaz, Zaire. Melania, Nigeria. Gallicia, France. Adoshaf, Fashoda. Kainogenigy, Africa (ex Africa semper aliquid novi). Tetulia, Lutetia, Paris, Balustan, Bear country, Russia. "Luschbuze," "Demon Rum," Tsoke, Soaker. Sebastian, Sevastopol. Axine, Euxine, Black Sea. New Times, Novoe Vremya. Noibla, Albion, England. Nolout, Toulon. Atlam, Malta.