

Unacknowledged but not Unrewarded by the State.

BEING AN APPRECIATION OF

“SECRETS OF MODERN SPYING.” By “VIGILANT.”

(PUBLISHED BY JOHN HAMILTON)

"The word 'spy,' say "Vigilant," "has an unpleasant sound in many ears; to his profession is attached stigma that often causes him to be despised by the masters he serves. For instance, Napoleon steadfastly refused to honour his famous spy, Schulmeister, with any order or distinction, although he paid him a princely salary." "Vigilant" protests. "This is a wrong attitude of mind; the spy who goes alone into the enemy's camp, where the mispronunciation of 1 word or ignorance of some trivial custom may betray him, deserves as well of his country as the soldier who serves it on the field of buttle. But the prejudice exists." ...

It certainly does exist; nor, unfair and unreasonable as Vigilant" shows it to be, can it ever, I think, be wholly eradicated. "Secrets of Modern Spying" an absorbing book, packed with instances of heroism; the reader is bound to feel the thrill and admire the courage. Yet he cannot rid himself of a sense of emotional discomfort; try as he will, he cannot give the business of spying, or Intelligence, or by whatever euphemism it is called, his whole-hearted approval. He dare not take the risks; he would not stand in a spy's shoes for the world; he knows that by looking askance on spying he indirectly censures men braver than himself and inspired by a stronger sense of duty to the State. Yet even after "Vigilant" has explained the conventions of the profession and, as it were, legalised it, one's scruples are not entirely laid aside. There is something distasteful in the duplicity inseparable from the spy's calling; it is the confidence-trick played over and over again. He uses friendship for an end which cannot be called base, since it is his country's good, but, all the same, there is a taint of treachery about it, a flavour of betrayal.

However, it is unnecessary to labour the point.. No one need be ashamed of patriotism; and reading this book will reveal to many who did not suspect themselves of being Jingo's how active is their predilection for their own country. "Vigilant's" survey of spying is international, and his choice of examples impartial. Many are furnished by the German Colonel Nikolai, and these naturally tend to redound to the glory of the Fatherland. One cannot bide from oneself the fact that espionage seems admirable when practised by the English, and indefensible when practised by the Germans.

Among the most ingenious of the spies whose achievements "Vigilant" regards were two women, presumably Germans. During the war a French agent in Lausanne reported a serious leakage of information, and due research ascertained the fact that a certain lady residing in France was in the habit of receiving large consignments of eggs from Switzerland. The counter-spies of the French Intelligence Service were therefore ordered to watch this lady. But when they came to survey her movements, they could not find her in association with any suspicious person. Her correspondence was severely censored, but no writing in invisible ink came to light. Her telephone conversations were tapped, but the listeners were done the wiser. In short, appearances made her out to be as benevolent fairy godmother as any young man at the Front could desire,

"But, as the information still leaked through to the enemy, the counter-spies played their last card, and took possession of a consignment of her eggs. Within twenty-four hours the French chemists solved the secret of the eggs, for when they were dipped in a certain solution of gall-nut, the writing on their shells was revealed. ... On an egg-shell was written a request for certain information concerning an Aerodrome at Buc and the movements of troops in the neighbourhood of Chalons."

That the consignee was guilty of espionage was now proved up to the hilt; but the task of the counter-spies was still only half-done; they had to find out what means she took to record her replies. "Awake or asleep, not one second of the day's twenty-four hours was she out of their sight. Their invisible eyes watched her having her locks waved and curled by a hairdresser from a neighbouring town, and observed with some astonishment how she wrote her replies on a pair of curling-tongs brought by the *coiffeur*. She traced the message with long pin;

the surface of the tongs was then coated over with a layer of soot and grease so that her confederate could leave it about in his shop without exciting suspicion."

Another woman-spy, Mme. Tichelly, used a simpler and equally effective device for sending her information to the proper quarter. She wrote it on "thin slips of paper inserted between two post-cards which she stuck together so effectively that for a long time they reached their destination unsuspected by the Censor." "Vigilant" usually puts the most favourable construction he can on the conduct of spies; he is reluctant to display moral indignation. But even he is shocked by Mme. Tichelly : for she used the information she obtained from her son's letters from the Front (she was French by birth, but German by sympathy) with so much effect that the Germans were able to inflict severe losses on the regiment in which he was serving. "When asked by her judges whether she did not realise that she might have been the cause of his death, she stared at them in uncomprehending amazement. Her callous disregard of all maternal feeling, which sealed her fate, persisted till the end, and she faced the firing party with the aggrieved air of a martyr. She had never killed anyone with her own hands, she reiterated, and it was therefore unjust that she should suffer the doom of a murderess.

Women spies are invested with a halo of romance that men in the same profession lack. Legends have grown round Mata Hari, the famous dancer, and "Mlle. Docteur," both secret agents in the pay of Germany. When Mata Hari was executed at Vincennes in 1917 she begged the officer in charge of the firing party to "aim at her heart and spare her face." There are many legends, all groundless, describing her last hours; one says she went to the place of execution "wrapped in a fur cloak, and, when the final moment came, she threw it away, to reveal her body in complete nudity, hoping that the firing party would refuse to carry out its orders. Another asserts that she received a hint that the rifles would be loaded with blank cartridges and she must feign death, so that afterwards she could be quietly smuggled out of the country. A third account describes her as behaving hysterically and kissing her hands to the firing party."

What seems certain is that she need not have been captured had she not been prepared to take inordinate risks as long as they brought her nearer to a certain Russian Captain Maroff, with whom she had fallen in love. Women spies are more sentimental than men. By exploiting their charms (many of them seem to have been ladies of easy virtue) they are often able to extract information which men cannot get; but, as against this, they labour under the disadvantage that their hearts sometimes betray them. Even – "Mlle. Docteur," one of the most famous and successful of all spies, who still lives on in Switzerland, half-demented through drug-taking, is said to have the name of one of her lovers continually on her lips. Her success was phenomenal; and the account that "Vigilant" gives of her career is perhaps the most complete and thrilling in all his collection of stories.

Women, says "Vigilant," have more dramatic sense than men, and are better natural actors. The German agent, Lody, who was executed in London during the war, helped to give himself away by a piece of bad acting. Posing as an American, he sent a telegram to a Swede in Stockholm. It was a business telegram, but he added a few words expressing his joy at a German defeat. This flagrant disregard of economy roused the suspicions of the censorial authorities.

A woman, "Vigilant" says, would never have been guilty of such a blunder. But they suffer from other drawbacks. They are less easy to disguise than men, who can change their appearance by growing a beard or a moustache, Vanity, too, stands in their way. They are unwilling to wear spectacles as a disguise "because they think that it detracts from their beauty, and this unwillingness to change their appearance for worse is a fatal vanity that has often been known to detract from the efficiency of a female agent."

In a chapter entitled "Humours of Spying," "Vigilant" shows that even Intelligence has its lighter side. One of the stories, which tells how the Germans continued to send money to a spy after he had been shot, money which English counter-spies used to buy a motor-car (they called it by the dead man's name), is a very grim joke. But nothing could be more diverting than the fate of the unfinished manuscript of James Joyce's novel, "Ulysses." This masterpiece of modern fiction was sent to the Censor, who thought it so obscure and baffling he could not believe it was a novel and despatched it to Room 40, the department in Scotland Yard where codes are deciphered. After much fruitless study, in which their best decoders failed to elicit the book's meaning, the officials decided that perhaps it was a novel after all. A man of letters was summoned, who pronounced that it "bore some faint resemblance to literature." Thus vouched for, the manuscript was set free.

"Vigilant" devotes three chapters to that very large subject - espionage in Russia. They are immensely interesting, but the task of selecting the chief plums from this crowded tree is by no means an easy one. I will conclude by giving three instances in which Intelligence, properly used, might have affected the course of the world's history. In each case the opportunity was missed; but the magnitude of the stakes shows what a tremendous weapon in a nation's hands its Secret Service is. One was an opportunity to take Constantinople. For four hours the Turkish batteries on either side of the Straits were without ammunition of any sort; the British ships, "Vigilant" thinks, might have steamed up the Dardanelles and taken Constantinople. But they were not informed of the enemy's helplessness, and so missed their chance. Similarly, in May 1915, the Italians might have taken advantage of the Austrian disorganisation to enter Trieste, thus perhaps antedating by three years the collapse of the dual monarchy. And in 1917, after the failure of Nivelle's offensive, there was a mutiny in the French troops; "for some critical hours the front line of one sector was held by a handful of artillerymen and engineers who spread themselves along the length of the trenches and tried to pretend that they represented a whole division." The Germans might have walked through, captured the French front line, and marched on Paris. But their spies gave them no information, and they stayed where they were.

L. P. H.

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