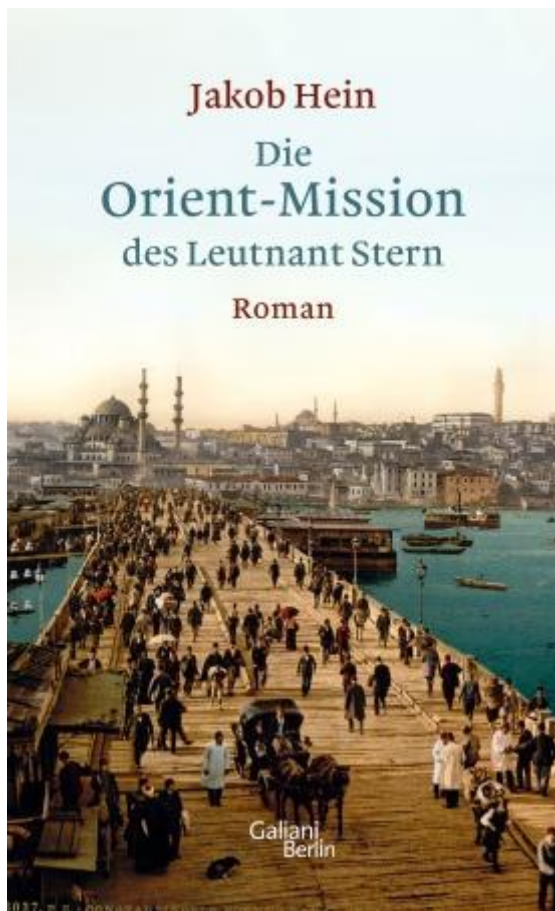


Sample Translation (pp. 5-7, 24-33, 78-92, 106-113)

Leutnant Stern and his Mission to the Orient by Jakob Hein

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STERN

At the beach

For Stern the Great War began with a single word in Greek, served up to him on a silver platter amidst the calm of a tranquil afternoon in an out-of-the-way seaside resort in Belgium. Tonie, the bellboy, had brought him his father's telegram in the bar of the Hotel Nynfea, where the family always stayed when holidaying on the Belgian coast. Stern had been relaxing in the lounge with Consul General Claus von Below-Saleske, who wanted to enjoy a cup of mocha with Stern while they tried out the cigars he had bought that morning in the Place du Grand Sablon in Brussels. The womenfolk had withdrawn for a quiet chat on their own.

Ostend was full of the hoi polloi, and hence so noisy, so dirty, so malodorous that nothing could ever be gained by going there to escape the confines of the capital. What's more, the German habit of building sandcastles had insinuated itself on its beaches – something that couldn't fail to ruin the holiday mood of anyone of a cultured disposition. Stern much preferred to come here to Coxyde, close to the border with France, a place that for all its modern features and its cosiness offered a decidedly superior milieu. There were better restaurants here, and for several years now there had even been a lavishly designed cinema that showed the very latest films from all over the world.

The slightly lived-in feel of the Nynfea, the hint of dust on the books in the lounge's small library, were part of the hotel's charm, and in any case such features were more than compensated for by the fact that the beach lay just a few short steps from its terrace, where private wicker beach-chairs stood ready for guests of the hotel and where you could always find an empty changing cubicle – unlike in Ostend. The summer of 1914 had thus far been splendidly untroubled: the sun shone down, the temperature was most agreeable, the seagulls were happily screeching away in the sky. Stern had enjoyed a wonderfully relaxing few days in the company of a select band of French and German friends. Furthermore, this was the first time he had visited Coxyde with his fiancée, and since her presence filled him with bliss wherever they happened to be, it was sheer perfection to be with her here in Coxyde.

‘The Baltic offers more pleasant conditions for bathing’, pontificated Below-Saleske, ‘but the weather here is not to be scorned, and it is extremely beneficial to one’s health.’ Since the Consul General’s family estate was at Saleske, a village in Pomerania very close to the Baltic coast, he regarded himself as being more or less honour-bound to sing the praises of his home area. And Stern didn’t challenge his sense of duty by pointing out that in Pomerania you couldn’t get Belgian waffles for breakfast or French oysters for dinner, not to mention cigars from the Dutch colonies. Here in Coxyde everyone – whether Belgian, English, Dutch, German or French – knew they were happily marooned in the finest little nook in the entire world.

Stern found out later that the Frankfurt telegraph office had had serious reservations about accepting his father’s message in its original form, and had also warned him that in the prevailing circumstances it could no longer be taken for granted that the message would be forwarded by the telegraph office in Brussels. Stern’s father had therefore devised a trick in the hope that – even under the reformed, so-called Frankfurt Curriculum – his son had acquired enough Greek at the Goethe-Gymnasium to understand his slightly coded message: ‘Recommend immediate return – polemos’. The fact that it was he who had sent the telegram ensured that it automatically carried an exclamation mark.

‘My dear Consul General,’ said Stern after reading the telegram for a second time, ‘I fear we must leave at once.’ He regretfully deposited his unfinished *Pintura* in the ashtray, where it would go cold while he was busy packing his suitcases. As the owner of a large textile factory with over two hundred employees, Stern’s father was not given to exaggeration. There were always problems of some sort in the factory – a localised fire, a supplier who sent wrong or faulty materials, an outbreak of dysentery among the workers that halted production for several days. In such circumstances Stern *père* had never shown any signs of panic, but had calmly set about doing whatever was necessary. ‘One thing at a time’ was more or less his motto. The very fact that he had sent a telegram, and that said telegram included the Greek word for ‘war’, left Stern in no doubt that swift action was called for.

When they had changed trains in the Gare Centrale in Brussels a few weeks earlier the commotion caused by the shooting in Sarajevo had still been very much in evidence. The

papers were churning out the craziest rumours, which had then spread like wildfire. But in the jolly little narrow-gauge train that carried them along the coast to their resort, the frantic buzz had already died away by the time they had passed through Ostend, leaving them free to delight in the splendid sea air and their joyful anticipation of the pleasures that lay ahead. Why on earth would the French and the Germans start fighting each other all over again when here they were, sitting together amiably and peaceably in the same railway compartment looking forward to their holiday by the sea? Nothing was going to happen: after all, countless countries big and small had been rattling their sabres for years without anything bad ever coming of it – so there had seemed no reason whatsoever to postpone a much-needed holiday by the sea.

But now it really did look as if it had happened: war had broken out – though not here in Coxyde as yet, where Stern and all the other Germans disposed to believe his warning were hurriedly packing their cases in the hope of catching the next train out. Beyond the windows of the exquisite Hotel Nynfea the same summer air as ever came wafting in from the sea, while the same super-exquisite smells were floating up once again from the kitchens below.

The small inland towns along their route such as Veume and Diksmuide also seemed through the train windows to be just as calm and sleepy as they had looked on the earlier journey in the opposite direction. But once they got out in Bruges to change to the train for Brussels there was already a different atmosphere. Incredulous glances at newspaper headlines and a vague sense of tension had intensified into a pervasive buzz and babble, and young men, though still in their civilian clothes, were already assuming the demeanour of soldiers. In Ghent the train filled up with such men, inspired by sheer patriotism to head straight to their capital city.

‘So what will you be doing?’ Stern asked the Consul General, discreetly using French: in their present situation it didn’t seem wise to speak in their own language. Their wives gazed nervously out of the window.

‘I’ll need first of all to find out what my instructions are’, replied Below-Saleske. ‘I’m assuming that my task will be to enquire on behalf of our government what side Belgium is proposing to be on in this war, and that very soon after that I shall have to abandon the consulate.’

‘Do you really think so?’

‘It’s an absolute certainty that Brussels won’t side with the *boches*. Things would be different if Flanders were in charge, but with the capital being Wallonian the country will never side with Teutons.’

‘And what then?’

‘I don’t know. A war like this is a mighty big thing. I’m sure they’ll find a use even for the likes of me. It’s a pity, really,’ sighed the Consul General, ‘I haven’t even done a full year in Brussels yet. After our years in Bulgaria my wife in particular had been looking forward to a good long spell somewhere civilised.’ Her only response to this remark was a fraught smile.

On arriving in Brussels itself, however, they found that civilisation appeared to be in a state of complete suspension, at least for the time being. Out in the squares huge crowds were chanting ‘Down with the huns’ and ‘Death to the Kaiser!’

‘Make sure you get out of here *today*, my young friend’, said Below-Saleske in a low voice. ‘Germans won’t enjoy freedom of movement here for very much longer.’

‘And what about you?’ Stern asked him.

‘I’m sure they’ll have decency enough to grant free passage to a diplomat. But *you* need to make for the border just as fast as you can.’

There were no longer any trains to Germany, but Stern and his fiancée managed to get Third Class tickets for a train going to Herbesthal, which no doubt had previously carried on to Eupen, but could no longer cross the border. The entire train was stuffed full of Germans keen to leave Belgium as rapidly as possible, with everyone anxiously uncertain about how they were going to get across the border.

Fortunately it all turned out to be fairly straightforward. No sooner had they stepped off the train in Herbesthal than they were met by German-speaking Belgians, who were enjoying the biggest bonanza of their lives; for although they were formally Belgians, and as

such would soon count as enemies, they regarded themselves as fellow Germans, and in return for vast sums of money were conveying their cultural kin in all manner of horse-drawn contraptions to Eupen, ten kilometres away. The price did include taking a safe route across the border, and this of course was the reason why Stern, like all the others, paid up, and duly made the journey in a poorly sprung charabanc.

Once back on German soil they could see that the rail tracks on the German side were packed with trains – the freight trucks with horses, wagons and heavy artillery on them, the passenger carriages with First Army soldiers encamped beside them: everything was in place for the imminent invasion of Belgium. The German generals clearly had a plan. The summer was over.

[...]

STERN

At the front

A few days later Stern, too, was right there amongst the barbarians. He had had to say goodbye to his beloved Theodora very soon after their return and report to barracks. He was now an officer in the 1st Westphalian Pioneer Battallion No. 7, charged with preparing a second line of defence on the right bank of the Rhine in case the French succeeded in breaking through the front. The need for cabling, trenches and other technical arrangements meant that within the space of a few days they had had to destroy magnificent old vineyards that had been the product of countless generations of the Rhineland's skill in winemaking. For Stern the whole business was in any case completely beyond his comprehension. As far back as he could remember, trips to France had been as much a part of his family life as trips to Switzerland. It was in Coxyde that they had become friendly with the family of a doctor, Victor Boley, and at the age of only fifteen Stern had been allowed to make his very first holiday trip on his own in order to go and stay with the Boley family.

And it was during this stay at the Boleys' splendid estate at Gespunsart in the Ardennes, where even the children were routinely given wine to drink, that Stern had suffered his first experience of getting completely drunk. Dr Boley had only just managed to save him

from drowning in the fountain in front of the castle. For the ensuing three days Stern had lived off nothing but Carvana mineral water – but in contrast to other Frankfurt youngsters, whose first experience of getting drunk was mostly the result of cider, Stern was able to boast throughout the rest of his life that he had first been made drunk by champagne in Champagne.

Magdelaine Boley, who at the time of Stern's first visit had been a stick-like creature only seven years old, had developed a serious crush on him eight years later while sequestered in her convent boarding school. He had received almost daily letters back then – lovelorn, smouldering, desperate, passionate, but also unfailingly long and spirited. It had eventually reached the point where Stern felt at one and the same time so flattered and so besieged that in 1911 he had asked Dr Boley out of sheer politeness for Magdelaine's hand in marriage. Fortunately Dr Boley had read the situation aright and laughed him out of court.

'Edgar, you are as dear to me as if you were my own son, but let's both say no to this madcap idea. What if Germany and France were to find themselves at war again? That would make at least one of us – and probably both – extremely miserable.' This resulted in Magdelaine sending a few more letters from her convent school, all of them heavy with grief and pain, but her father married her off to a doctor in the Jura soon afterwards – without doubt a far better outcome for all concerned.

To Stern, however, his fatherly friend's assessment of the relationship between France and Germany had seemed utterly nonsensical. The two countries had too much in common; it had seemed to Stern that the Enlightenment, the advent of the machine age, the extensive industrial co-operation between the two countries, ruled out any possibility of them slithering into a war that would seem positively mediaeval. He himself had visited France on countless occasions, and had always regarded the border as a mere unavoidable nuisance.

Moreover, Lady Luck had intervened in her typical way, for Stern did after all find the love of his life on the Boley estate in the Ardennes. In the summer of 1913, with Stern approaching thirty and his parents having slowly abandoned all hope of seeing him marry and accustomed themselves to having an eternal bachelor for a son, he had made the acquaintance of Mademoiselle Rubarth, who happened to be staying with the Boleys while resting from her studies at the University of Nancy. It had seemed to Edgar especially fitting that her name meant 'gift from god'. Theodora wanted to become a secondary school teacher; clever as well

as beautiful, she came from an exceptionally high-flying academic family: her grandfather had discovered morphium, her uncle had invented the medial telescope. Whilst it may be arguable whether the town of Geseke belongs to the Sauerland, to the Paderborn region, or possibly even to the Westphalian Basin, it is certainly beyond argument that here in the Ardennes Lady Luck had brought together two people whose family estates in Germany were only a few train stops away from one another.

They had quite quickly become engaged, in May 1914, and were planning to marry the following year. When war broke out they could have married very quickly, as many did, before the menfolk went off to fight. Influenced to some extent by the events of August, couples pledged themselves in their wedding ceremonies not only to each other but also to the Fatherland, before the men then marched off to the front singing patriotic songs. As a result there were long queues outside Registry Offices, which were also keen to demonstrate their dedication to the Fatherland and so carried out fast-track ‘war-weddings’.

But Edgar and Theodora had decided against having a wedding of that sort. They loved each other absolutely, and privately both of them felt deeply unenthusiastic about the war. And in any case, Edgar having waited so long for his luck to turn – finishing his education and finding his vocation as a journalist before encountering his future wife – he could certainly wait a bit longer for the war to finish before entering on marriage, especially as it was generally reckoned that the fighting would all be over within a few months.

So there he was now, at the very heart of the war, having the vines ripped from the south-facing slopes of the vineyards in the searing August heat and replaced by cabling dug into the valuable slate soil, in case the French advanced on the Rhine. It was altogether possible that ~~Magdaleine's~~ Magdeleine's brother – who could easily have become his brother-in-law – would join the fighting as an officer on the other side. Stern was therefore alarmed when one day all the church bells in the local town began ringing non-stop. It was clearly not for a wedding. Their commandant sent his orderly down into the town on his horse, and he returned with the news that England had now also entered the war.

‘Well, we just have to hope and pray that God isn’t an Englishman’, said the commandant – a headmaster in civilian life. England was a great power that not only enjoyed

a strong industrial base and ruled the waves with its navy, the largest in the world – it also had millions of people in its colonies, and thus had an inexhaustible source of troops.

There was one thing in particular that Stern had missed ever since he had removed the books and bright summer-holiday apparel from his suitcase and replaced them practically that same evening with sturdy, practical clothing, ever since he had reported to the Cologne headquarters of the 1st Westphalians (his family came from Münster, after all), and ever since he had found himself doing nothing but dashing about in the heat in his uniform – and that one thing was *writing*. For the previous ten years he had worked for Gustav Stresemann, originally a representative of the chocolate manufacturers' trade association, then a National Liberal town councillor in Dresden, and finally the youngest member of the Reichstag. Stern's job was to look after what Stresemann, the slighter older of the two, called 'all the journalistic stuff', and in his spare time he had also contrived to have pieces published in every conceivable newspaper and magazine. The *Vossische Zeitung*, the *Kölnische Zeitung* and even *Simplizissimus* had always been eager to publish his articles. Stern's various different activities gained mutual benefit from all this: his journalistic work kept him extremely well informed about developments in the press, while his work for Stresemann kept him equally well informed about developments in world politics.

In the course of Stresemann's decisively important election campaign for the Reichstag seat of Annaberg, Stern had had to soak up more about Germany's colonial and naval policies than he would ever have imagined possible. Germany, still a new nation, was far from becoming – let alone *being* – a colonial power, and without a massive navy this state of affairs was never going to change. Stern was not the only one, however, to ask himself whether having colonies was still in any way appropriate to the age in which they were now living. After all, the German Empire was doing phenomenal business with distant countries in the East, such as France or Great Britain could only dream of in respect of their colonies. The prime example of this was the Berlin-Baghdad railway, which after Constantinople went via Aleppo and Mosul through almost the entire Orient to Baghdad, and for the construction of which Siemens had gained the contract, to the great surprise and irritation of the ~~the~~ British, who had been supremely confident of winning. The vast area stretching twenty kilometres on both sides of the entire length of the line – thousands and thousands of hectares of oil-rich land – had been leased to the German Empire for a period of 100 years. And all of that

without a shot being fired, and without any of the complications involved in dealing with a colonial administration or a hostile local populus.

What would be the point of sending German troops to countries whose peoples and cultures we don't understand? Why spend money on running faraway colonies when money can so easily be earned through amicable business relations? And instead of ending up with a dagger in your ribs, you would have a medal pinned to your chest by the locals.

Every now and again, Stern wrote a letter to Theodora, his beloved fiancée – but that aside he had nothing to occupy his restless mind and, since his mind couldn't simply be switched off, he started formulating ideas of his own about the war which he then pondered like a chess player and either rejected or refined; 'mind training' he called it. And although it didn't remotely accord with his military rank or the actual job he was doing, he dwelt intensively on the 'English Question', a hot topic in the press at that juncture: what if England *didn't* remain neutral after all, and with all the might of its huge empire entered the war on the side of the Entente countries?

Fortunately his commanding officer was an easy-going type, and whilst their exertions amongst the vineyards may have been exhausting, they had very little in common with the bloody realities of the front, and as a result Stern had plenty of opportunities to develop his ideas. They were very comfortably billeted in the outbuildings of local farms, and generously supplied with provisions by the farmers, including the region's excellent wine. Especially generous supplies were bestowed on them when the locals were allowed to make recommendations and requests regarding the treatment of the hillsides and the vines in the course of the fortification works, with the result that everything necessary was accomplished, but without any needless damage being done.

During the early days of the war they were thus able to enjoy extremely cosy evenings, with cheese and wine thrown in, and Stern made good use of them to develop his schemes aimed at defeating England.

A few of the sappers he was stationed with knew all about explosives, and Stern himself brought his knowledge of world politics to the table. The vicar of Rheinberg lent him an atlas – published in 1904, and hence reasonably up to date. These were ideal conditions that

enabled Stern to dream up one of the most breath-taking plans of the Great War – at that stage still in its infancy.

Once he had finalised his plan and set it all out on paper, it seemed to him imperative that his brilliant solution to the biggest problem facing Germany in the war be urgently communicated to the very highest echelons. He decided, however, that submitting his cunning scheme through the proper official channels would waste far too much time. In civilian life his commandant had been head of a secondary school in Braunfels: how could he possibly appreciate an international-scale war plan? Stern therefore wrote to his father asking him to meet with him at headquarters in Cologne. There, he handed him a folder containing twelve meticulously detailed and beautifully penned foolscap pages: ‘Get this to the General Staff, dear Father, and please don’t let yourself be fobbed off with some underling or other. The best plan would be to deliver it straight to the general in overall command.’

‘But what is it?’ his father wanted to know.

‘A plan for defeating England’, Stern declared proudly.

‘Are you out of your mind?’ his father replied anxiously, ‘Has the heat got to you?’

‘Father, I’m more than thirty years old now! You can have complete confidence in me.’

‘So did you draw up this plan on somebody else’s orders?’

‘Of course not. You know how it is with me: if I don’t have anything to think about, my mind finds something all on its own to keep it busy.’

‘I am indeed aware of that’, sighed his father. He brandished the envelope containing Stern’s plan: ‘And this won’t get me court-martialed on the spot?’

‘Absolutely not. The only risk you face is that of being given a *medal* on the spot.’

Stern *père* looked anxiously at his son, whose maverick ideas were already very familiar to him, but then stuck the folder containing the plan in his briefcase.

[...]

STERN

In the Colonial Office

On Monday morning Stern presented himself in Major Braubach's office at 8am on the dot. As the major had indicated, Turkey had indeed closed the Dardanelles to all vessels other than those of the Turkish navy, and in so doing had to all intents and purposes entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, the only element still missing being formal declarations of war by the various parties involved. Good though it was to have gained another ally, albeit the 'sick man of the Bosphorus', this turn of events was unfortunate so far as Stern's plan was concerned. Up to the point when the papers had announced the news on the Sunday evening, Stern had still held out hope that Enver Pasha might change his mind.

When Stern entered Braubach's office, however, he found him freshly shaven and in the best of moods. 'Stern, how splendid. Good to see you! Do come in!'

'I'm glad to find you in such good spirits, sir.'

'I'm very happy for you, Stern! I managed this morning to land you a superb job!'

'Have you?!' Stern was baffled: he had just seen a 'superb job' go up in smoke.

'I have indeed. You did want to go the Orient, didn't you? You want to gaze at the stars in the land of the crescent moon, hear imams summoning the faithful to prayers from their minarets, have fairy-tales whispered into your ear by the fiery-eyed daughters of viziers – am I right?'

'Y-e-s', replied Stern hesitantly, not yet quite knowing what to make of Braubach's effusions.

'Well, these things will soon all be yours to enjoy. And in return you don't even have to take any explosives to Constantinople – just a few Mohammedans.'

'I beg your pardon?!'

‘The best thing would be for you to go to 62 Wilhelmstrasse yourself, and there, in the Colonial Office, you’ll meet... um...’ – the major glanced at a document on his desk – ‘... Baron Karl Emil Schabinger von Schowingen, formerly of the Imperial Embassy in Tangiers, a superlative expert on the Orient, who has been put in charge of your little expedition. He will explain the details to you.’

‘Karl Emil Schowinger von...’, said Stern, trying to recapture the name.

‘Yes,’ replied Braubach contentedly, ‘our aristocracy still boasts thoroughly respectable names. The Schabingers of Schowingen are a family from the southern part of Baden with a strong penchant for all things exotic. Karl’s older brother Julius likes painting extremely naked women, and Karl seeks his exoticism in the Orient. There’s a whole gang of these orientalists in the Colonial Office. Pop over and talk to him, you’re both much the same age; you might not even have to remember the whole of his name.’

‘Fine. When am I expected?’

‘Yesterday, as always. Get going straightaway’, said Braubach. ‘We’ll formalise your posting through the usual official channels – you don’t need to bother your head about that at all. And get him to tell you about the “Turkey trick”.’

‘What on earth is that?!’

‘Ask the baron!’

Stern left the Ministry of War, went a short distance along Leipziger Strasse until he reached Wilhelmstrasse, then walked up it for a few hundred metres until he reached Number 62 and the Foreign Ministry. During his short walk he had time enough to be amazed all over again at the cataclysmic turn of world events. Only a few weeks earlier during this very same summer he had been enjoying himself in a seaside hotel, where his biggest worry had been whether he should choose Belgian beer or French wine to accompany his dinner, and now here he was in Berlin’s Wilhelmstrasse wearing a uniform and dashing from one ministry to another, both of them central to the war effort.

He was indeed already expected at the Colonial Office, and immediately ushered into the presence of the First Secretary. Baron Karl Emil Schabinger von Schowingen was not particularly tall, had dark black hair, and plainly set little store by his appearance. He looked searchingly at Stern, not deigning to offer him a seat. ‘So you are Edgar Stern?’

‘1st Westphalian Pioneers, Sir.’

‘You are actually a journalist, am I right? A national-liberal, if I’m not mistaken?’

‘I don’t belong to any political party.’ At least he could dispel one of the baron’s criticisms.

‘But you worked for Stresemann, did you not?’

‘Herr Stresemann was concerned to keep the press well informed at all times. I was able to help him a little in that endeavour.’

‘Sounds almost American to me. And of course the path from democracy to mob rule is not all that long. **[Hein schreibt hier “Der Weg von der Demokratie zur Ochlokratie ist eben nicht besonders kurz”, meint aber doch wohl das Gegenteil – so habe ich es jedenfalls übersetzt; andernfalls müßte es “all that short” heißen.]** But what do you know about the Orient? How long have you spent there?’

‘I know only what I have read in books. I have never been there myself.’

‘Really?’ Schabinger von Schowingen inserted a telling pause. ‘Do you at least speak any of the Semitic languages?’

‘No.’

‘Not even Hebrew?’

‘Not so far as I’m aware’, replied Stern, hoping that irony might serve to rescue him from this extremely unpleasant situation. As Liberal Jews his family had really only attended the synagogue in Münster’s Klosterstrasse on major feast days, and then only to please his paternal grandmother. Stern had distant memories of the cantor singing *baruch adonai elohey yisrael*, but as he didn’t even know what those words meant, it presumably really was the case that he didn’t know any Hebrew. For the rest, his family was a mixture of Jews, Protestants

and Catholics. None of them were seriously *au fait* with their religion. Theodora's background being Roman Catholic through and through, they had promised one another that they would have a Catholic wedding.

Stern knew only too well what was going through the mind of Schabinger von Schowingen. Until very recently the diplomatic service, and also the officer corps, had been the exclusive preserve of the aristocracy. The officer corps had even opposed the enlargement of the Prussian army because they didn't want any members of the bourgeoisie entering their ranks. And now this scion of one of Baden's foremost aristocratic families found himself compelled to have dealings with a bourgeois arriviste, who on top of everything else was probably a Jew. For Schabinger Stern presumably represented neither more nor less than the grim writing on the wall described in the Book of Daniel – a book, after all, revered by Jews and Christians alike.

In the meantime, however, Schabinger von Schowingen had already launched forth. 'We have just managed by the very skin of our teeth to get out of Tangier, where I served for almost fifteen years as Second Interpreter at the German embassy, which means that I speak Moroccan Arabic, Persian and a little Turkish. Almost everything in Tangier is now firmly in the hands of the French, but thanks to my excellent contacts I was able to escape the debacle just in time.'

'Yes', said Stern. He didn't know what else to say.

'Please do take a seat', offered the baron in a tone now suddenly more gracious. In stark contrast to Braubach's office, the baron's was orderliness itself, with not a speck of dust in sight. Two chairs for visitors were ranged to left and right of an oriental-type smokers' table in polished brass. 'So it was you who devised the Suez plan?'

'Yes.'

'A foolhardy venture – but not without its merits, as I must admit. It would have proved a considerable headache for the British Empire: Tommy's very existence depends on the trading routes to India remaining open, whether by land or by sea. You are perhaps aware that Bismarck described the Suez Canal as the nerve in England's neck that connects its

backbone to its brain. If we had destroyed that nerve, Tommy would have been stopped in his tracks.’

‘Indeed. But following the events of Sunday the plan is now dead in the water.’

‘Correct. The oh-so-sick man of the Bosphorous has shown that he can still bite.’

Stern decided that this would be an appropriate moment for him to pass on Braubach’s greetings. ‘And by the way’, he added, ‘Major Braubach suggested that I ask you about the “Turkey trick”.’

Schabinger von Schowingen leapt out of his chair, and for several seconds his face was the picture of rage. ‘He said that?!’

Stern spontaneously recoiled on his chair. ‘Yes’, he said uncertainly. ‘Perhaps I misunderstood him.’

‘I very much doubt that’, hissed von Schowingen. ‘The misunderstanding is not yours, but rather your Major’s, for he has clearly not understood how to deal correctly with top secret military documents.’

‘So that means... Well, no matter what it means.’

The baron had by now collected himself a little and settled back in his chair. He thought for a moment. ‘You know, I think that in the circumstances I can give you the full story. The whole thing is still highly confidential, however, and the next few days are critically important. Can you keep secrets, Stern?’

‘Of course. The War Ministry had already made explosives ready for me to take to Cairo. I scarcely think that such trust would have been placed in some random, run-of-the-mill journalist.’

‘That does make sense’, conceded von Schowingen, who had meanwhile completely recovered his equanimity, ‘so let me explain our little plan to you. The German Navy has two ships in the Mediterranean, the battle cruiser Goeben, and an armoured cruiser, the Breslau. Both of them evaded the British by slipping through the Bosphorous and taking refuge in the Black Sea. The British under Admiral Milne are now blockading the Dardanelles in order to

prevent the Goeben and Breslau from escaping. Tomorrow, however, both ships are to be handed over lock, stock and barrel to the Turkish navy.’

‘I thought the Turks were our allies?’

‘And so they are. Our relations with the Sublime Porte could not be better. And we won’t be losing our cruisers in battle, but selling them, officially speaking, to their Minister for War, Enver Pasha.’

‘And what about the crews?’

‘We’re selling them too. Admiral Souchon is being co-opted into the Turkish navy together with his entire crew. They’ve even got fezzes ready for the officers to wear. It’s all due to happen the day after tomorrow. The ships will be renamed and then carry the war into the Black Sea as part of the Turkish navy. Admiral Souchon is going to attack the Russians – in Crimea and in Novorossiysk. If the Entente want a war, they can have it.’

‘So that’s the “Turkey trick”?’ asked Stern in astonishment.

‘It is indeed’, replied Schabinger von Schowingen contentedly. ‘But you aren’t here to listen to me *telling* you about wartime tricks of the trade: you’re here to carry one out yourself.’

‘Am I really?’

‘You certainly are. Do you know what “jihad” is, by any chance?’

‘No – to be honest, I don’t.’

‘That’s unfortunate, as it’s your job to stir one up.’

‘I beg your pardon?’

‘Jihad is Arabic, and means “struggle”, “strive”, “make a big effort”. The concept occurs in the Koran and signifies the Muslims’ struggle to ensure the victory of Islam over its oppressors.’

‘Just a second: do you mean the universal Muslim uprising that we’re keen to start? I’ve heard about that.’

‘Exactly right’, said Schabinger. ‘Except that we’re not aiming to start it ourselves. As infidels we’re scarcely in a position to do so. But we want to help our friends to launch this Holy War.’

‘And what’s my role in all of this?’

‘None, as yet. But the Sultan of Constantinople is proposing to proclaim jihad, and you are to be there when he does so.’

‘Me?! When does the Sultan intend to do this?’

‘I shall decide that for him in due course’, replied Schabinger with a touch of smugness.

‘But as a Christian nation aren’t we also at risk if the Muslims of the world start a war?’

Schabinger gave a snort of laughter. ‘My dear Stern, if the world’s three hundred million Muslims rise up in armed struggle to demand their rights, will that be a good or a bad thing for us?’

‘It sounds dangerous to me’, replied Stern, trying to imagine three hundred million Turks all brandishing their scimitars above their heads.

‘Wrong! Completely and utterly wrong!’ Schabinger exclaimed. ‘If the Muslims of the world rise up against their oppressors it will be hugely beneficial to the Reich. Just think for a moment, Stern: where do you find Muslims?’

‘In the Ottoman Empire?’

Yes, there too – but where else in the world? In India there are millions of Muslims, ten times as many Muslims as all the Britons put together. There are Muslims in Russia: the Tsar’s bravest soldiers all pray to Allah. And there are millions of Muslims in the French colonies. If all these Muslims follow the call of the Sultan and rebel, our war here in Europe will be as good as won. Along with the British, the French and the Russians, the entire Entente will then face a much bigger problem than losing a patch of land in Belgium or Galicia. The great powers of Europe will be rocked to their very foundations.’

‘But has there ever been such a thing – a rebellion of all the world’s Muslims?’

‘Not on this scale as yet, maybe, but are you perhaps aware of the Mahdi Rebellion?’

‘I’m not sure. Do you mean the troubles in the Sudan?’

‘Quite right. Muhammad Ahmad was proclaimed by his people to be the Mahdi, the God-appointed leader of the faithful. With his ragtag army, the so-called *ansar*, he managed to cause the Egyptians and the British a real headache for almost twenty years, from 1881 to 1899. The Mahdi had declared Holy War, and succeeded in wresting Sudan from the British; several British generals were sent packing by the *ansar*.’

Stern was horrified. ‘Are you saying that we’re going to instigate a war of this sort across the entire world?!’

‘Look, if the son of a Sudanese boatbuilder is capable of causing the Tommies so much trouble, how much trouble do you think can we cause the colonial powers if the fighting spirit and determination of the world’s Muslims can be fully mobilised by the well-oiled war machine of the German Reich?’

‘And where did this idea come from?’

‘From us.’

‘So Christian Germany is out to incite an uprising on the part of all the world’s Muslims?’

‘I wouldn’t exactly say “incite”. But we want to encourage it. You need to see Germany’s role here as resembling our involvement in the Baghdad railway: the people who travel on it are almost exclusively Mohammedans, but the track and the engines were built by Germans.’

‘But what difference does this make to Germany? There aren’t any Muslims living in Germany.’

‘Only because our Kaiser was born a Christian. He said so himself: “If I hadn’t been born a Christian, I would be a Muslim today.” But then, as you know, our Kaiser easily gets carried away – “Wilhelm the Sudden”, as some people call him. Even so: remarks like that

win him friends among the Mohammedans – he’s highly respected in those quarters. What’s more, we’ve never subjugated any Muslims – we do business with them instead. We’re building the Baghdad railway for them, by which means we’ll be able to convey *our* goods to the Orient, and bring *their* oil back here. Who’s going to be interested in seas and ships if they can travel better and faster by land? I’m telling you: we’re in good odour with the Muslims – and it needs to stay that way. Then if the world falls apart all around us, we’ll be stronger than ever we were: the mighty power at the centre of a weak Europe.’

‘My enemy’s enemy is my friend, so to speak?’

‘There’s the advantage you have if you have learnt Arabic, Stern: that quotation of yours is in fact only part of an Arabic proverb. The full version goes like this: “There are three kinds of enemy: my enemy, my friend’s enemy, and my enemy’s friend. There are three kinds of friend: my friend, my friend’s friend, and my enemy’s enemy.” Many Muslims are also our friends.’

‘So it’s all about strengthening our opponents’ opponents?’

‘Look, Stern, there are two ways of waging war. The old method sought to defeat the enemy on the battlefield. That’s fine provided you have the appropriate resources and deploy them well. But the modern method seeks to strengthen the hand of your enemy’s mortal enemy. With a bit of luck you can knife your enemy in the back using relatively modest resources, and without having to breach walls that even Big Bertha wouldn’t be able to destroy. Consider this: in Switzerland we have a man called Ulyanov, a Russian and a Social Democrat, a thoroughly ghastly individual, even though he’s actually an aristocrat by birth. He lived in Berlin and Munich for a while. This man Ulyanov is one of Tsar Nicholas’s fiercest enemies. So we leave him alone - and not only that: we’re beginning to ask ourselves how we might get him into Russia, at our own expense. A Russian socialist! But that’s what insurrections entail. We can’t choose our enemy’s enemies. The Kaiser wants us to incite the Muslims to all-out rebellion. That’s why - following the advice of Max von Oppenheim - the Intelligence Bureau for the Orient has been set up by our Chief of General Staff, von Moltke, so that we can understand and influence the flow of information in the Orient, and encourage pan-islamism in Germany and in the world at large.’

‘What’s pan-islamism, if I might ask?’

‘It’s a word coined by von Oppenheim, and it denotes the aims of those seeking to get the world’s Muslims to rise up and come together as a single unified force. And we want to encourage this process. In a few weeks the Sultan of Constantinople, the official leader of the world’s Muslims, will declare jihad. And we two, Stern, you and I, are responsible for ensuring that the German Reich’s support for this cause is made crystal clear.’

‘How are we supposed to achieve that? Does the Kaiser want us to hang out flags and banners?’

‘Don’t be absurd! On such a day we obviously can’t go around Constantinople brandishing the flag of the German Reich! Our task is to get a few of the Reich’s Muslim prisoners of war to Constantinople in time for the proclamation of jihad so that they can hail the Sultan and assure him of Germany’s support and of its friendship for the world’s Muslims.’

‘And where do we get these prisoners of war from?’

‘Don’t worry, I’ll see to that. I’ll get going tomorrow and bag us a good dozen Muslims of the very best sort. Your task is the most difficult part of the enterprise: getting the Muslims from here to Constantinople.’

‘By rail, I assume?’

‘Well, we obviously can’t do it by sea’, snapped Schabinger impatiently. ‘But try giving it a bit more thought: what do you suppose the Rumanians will say if we attempt to travel to Constantinople with a bunch of French prisoners of war?!’

‘But Rumania’s neutral!’

‘For heaven’s sake spare me such nonsense! The old king, Carol I, was more or less on the point of aligning himself with the Central Powers, but his miserable nephew Ferdinand is unlikely to do us the same favour. While it’s true that he hasn’t as yet formally joined the Entente, it’s clearly just a question of time. What you need to do is to have a serious think about how you can get us from here to Constantinople!’

That was plainly the end of the conversation so far as the baron was concerned. He arose abruptly from his chair and gave Stern a formal handshake. Stern didn't mind in the least being dismissed from Schabinger's office: Braubach had always offered him coffee and tobacco, and his chairs were more comfortable too.

[...]

STERN

Time to pack

It was one of the great advantages of an aristocratic background that one did not have to bother oneself with life's practical problems. Schabinger von Schowingen had presumably grown up in a household in which a valet handed him his ready-packed suitcases and the appropriate travel documents whenever he went travelling. Among the many disagreeable aspects of life completely unknown to the likes of Schabinger was the complex challenge of organising a railway journey for fourteen Muslims plus two escorts in the middle of a war, and in the teeth of Prussian bureaucracy.

For whilst Prussian bureaucracy is – before all else – a miracle of administrative organisation that fulfils its mission faithfully and with absolute precision, the system is about as useless as a Swiss clock would be to a doctor trying to take a patient's temperature once it is faced with an unfamiliar and urgent challenge such as that presented by Stern. The fact that the men were Muslims was neither here nor there: they might just as well have been cannibals or martians, for the problem was that they were neither soldiers – for whom the military would have been responsible – nor foreign diplomats – for whom the Foreign Ministry would have been responsible. And if it was unclear who bore responsibility, then it was only logical that there was no funding available to pay for the necessary rail tickets.

In the process of devising his Suez plan, Stern had in fact accumulated considerable experience of bureaucracies, and developed quite a knack for taking temperatures by means of a Swiss clock. Following thousands of phone calls and personal visits by Stern to the Colonial Office it was agreed that for official purposes at least the venture would be categorised as a 'Prisoner Transport (Special Circumstances)'. Stern and Schabinger were listed in the

paperwork as an ‘Escort detachment’, and the Muslims as ‘Prisoners of war’ who, exceptionally, had been granted third-class tickets for a civilian train as no military means of transport were deemed to be available.

It proved relatively easy to obtain appropriate clothing for the fourteen Muslims: Stern presented himself together with the entire group in the prison offices, produced the relevant paperwork, and was thus able to put in an order for the clothes – a process which again entailed particular challenges, as we shall soon see. Obtaining passports for the Mohammedans was far more difficult. At least the Tunisians knew their birth dates and were capable of writing their names – but this was beyond most of the Moroccans and Algerians. Although Stern had help in communicating with them from Saleh al-Sharif, a Tunisian expert from the Intelligence Bureau for the Orient, it turned out that several were unable to provide a surname, let alone their exact date of birth.

Stern made notes on all the prisoners so that, once back in Wilhelmstrasse, he and al-Sharif were able to put their heads together and estimate the age of each individual. Following this, Al-Sharif also devised a surname for every prisoner that couldn’t provide one, simply by using the name of the villages the Moroccans came from, or the names of peaks in the Atlas Mountains. Stern then communicated these details via the Colonial Office’s own postal service to Military Headquarters with the request that passports be issued for the prisoners.

He had to wait no fewer than four days – an incomprehensible delay given the strategic importance of the enterprise. Then when Stern took a look at the passports, he could scarcely believe his eyes: in the case of every prisoner for whom he had provided an estimated year of birth, but no specific date, ‘1 January’ had been entered as the date of birth. Such were the procedures of the Prussian administrative machine: precise to the point of absurdity. The result was that, according to the passports, fully half of their oriental stooges shared the same date of birth. With such a vital project – a war stratagem, as they could plainly see, and which consisted in getting fourteen orientals through hostile territory as inconspicuously as possible – it was essential to avoid anything that might provoke undue interest on the part of border officials. Stern had the seven passports in question returned to Headquarters by express post with the instruction that random birthdates were to be entered instead. He had helpfully included seven birthdates picked out of the air to ensure that the

nincompoops in Administration didn't take advantage of yet another opportunity to mess things up.

The clothing for the journey arrived the following day. Stern had worked out a plan that pleased him just as much as his earlier Suez scheme had done. How to get fourteen decidedly oriental-looking Muslims from Berlin to Constantinople: that was the challenge that had faced him. Should they try to pass the Muslims off as either Germans or Austrians? In that event they would have had to pretend that the good people only spoke Ruthenian and therefore couldn't understand anything that was said to them. But their game could have been up at the Rumanian border, as the border guards might have included Ukrainians, who would have noticed that the men only spoke Arabic and other oriental languages. If it came to the point, no one would swallow the story that these men were citizens of Germany or Austria.

It would surely cause a considerable stir if fourteen oriental-looking German citizens in the prime of life were to travel to Constantinople. They could easily be suspected of being a commando unit on a secret mission – which indeed they were in a sense. Their main problem was Rumania. The country was officially still neutral, but probably already inclined to be hostile. The authorities might subject the entire group to elaborate checks, interrogate them, and detain them for a considerable period. Such things were commonplace now that war had broken out, and as a result they wouldn't stand a chance of reaching Constantinople in time, indeed they might not get there at all. But how else was one to get fourteen extremely exotic-looking men, all of an ideal age for military service, right across Europe for hundreds of kilometres without attracting any undue attention?

Stern had hit on the solution thanks to an American story he had read in his youth, *The Purloined Letter*. Instead of going to inordinate lengths to conceal something, so the story tells us, we can also make it invisible by positively flaunting it. So instead of going to all the trouble of dinning a few German phrases into the men from the Maghreb, shaving their beards off, perhaps even bleaching their hair, Stern would deliberately exaggerate their oriental appearance. And what plausible reason might there be for fourteen oriental men to be travelling the length of Europe? Stern's solution was to conjure up a circus supposedly boasting fourteen specially selected performers. The orientals were described in the paperwork as horsemen and trapeze artists - that way, the border guards wouldn't be able to

hit on the idea of getting them to prove themselves by demonstrating their routines. Stern himself would play the part of Ringmaster, while the real leader of the expedition, Baron von Schowingen, would travel Sleeper Class and give the appearance of having no connection whatever with the 'circus'. A plan of this kind was sure to succeed, thought Stern, and Schabinger von Schowingen had deigned to approve it, not least because he didn't have any better ideas.

In line with his plan, Stern had been down to the prison offices and ordered appropriate clothing for his 'artistes'. On the requisition slip that he submitted to Military Headquarters he had requested 'Oriental clothing of the most outlandish type, such as is commonly to be found in circuses, e.g. fez, baggy trousers, velvet cummerbund, brocade jacket etc.'. The relevant measurements of the prisoners had been noted down during the visit to the Telegraph Battalion barracks, and duly included in the requisition papers. Stern asked for the clothes to be delivered direct to the barracks in Alt-Treptow so that the prisoners could try on their costumes then and there.

Having assumed that nothing else could possibly happen to cause him any concern, Stern was flabbergasted when he turned up with al-Sharif two days before departure to make a final check and issue instructions. The prisoners had donned their costumes and were already out on the barracks square ready to greet them. There they were, standing in two neat rows of seven, ordered by height like so many organ pipes, staring straight ahead with cheerful expressions on their faces. A drill sergeant would probably have been just as happy at the sight of them as Stern was horrified. The idiots in Central Administration had in effect had fourteen identical uniforms prepared: fourteen fezzes, fourteen pairs of baggy trousers, fourteen brocade jackets etc. – all exactly the same as each other.

Stern turned on his heel and rushed off to the premises of one Straus, a skilled Jewish tailor in Heidereutergasse that he had discovered a few weeks earlier; commandeering the bewildered master tailor and an appropriate selection of implements and other essentials in the name of the Imperial Army, he was back in the Alt-Treptow barracks just two hours later. In sharp contrast to the work Straus normally undertook as a master tailor, his job here was to pull the clothes apart, insert deliberate flaws, add patches where none were necessary, and do whatever was required to make the garments look as dissimilar as possible. In addition, the

prisoners were instructed to wear bits of their original clothing, provided that these didn't identify them as belonging to one of the Entente armies. At last, shortly before midnight, the prisoners' get-up vaguely resembled that of a circus troupe, and Stern let Master Tailor Straus return home to the Scheunenviertel together with the promise of a substantial recompense for all his hard work from the Colonial Office, which he immediately put in hand the following morning.

Finally, the seven missing passports arrived, bearing the seven random birth-dates that Stern had hurriedly dreamt up. They were ready to go.