

Irregular Forces.

A Story of Chess and War.

By RAYMUND ALLEN.

Illustrated by Warwick Reynolds.



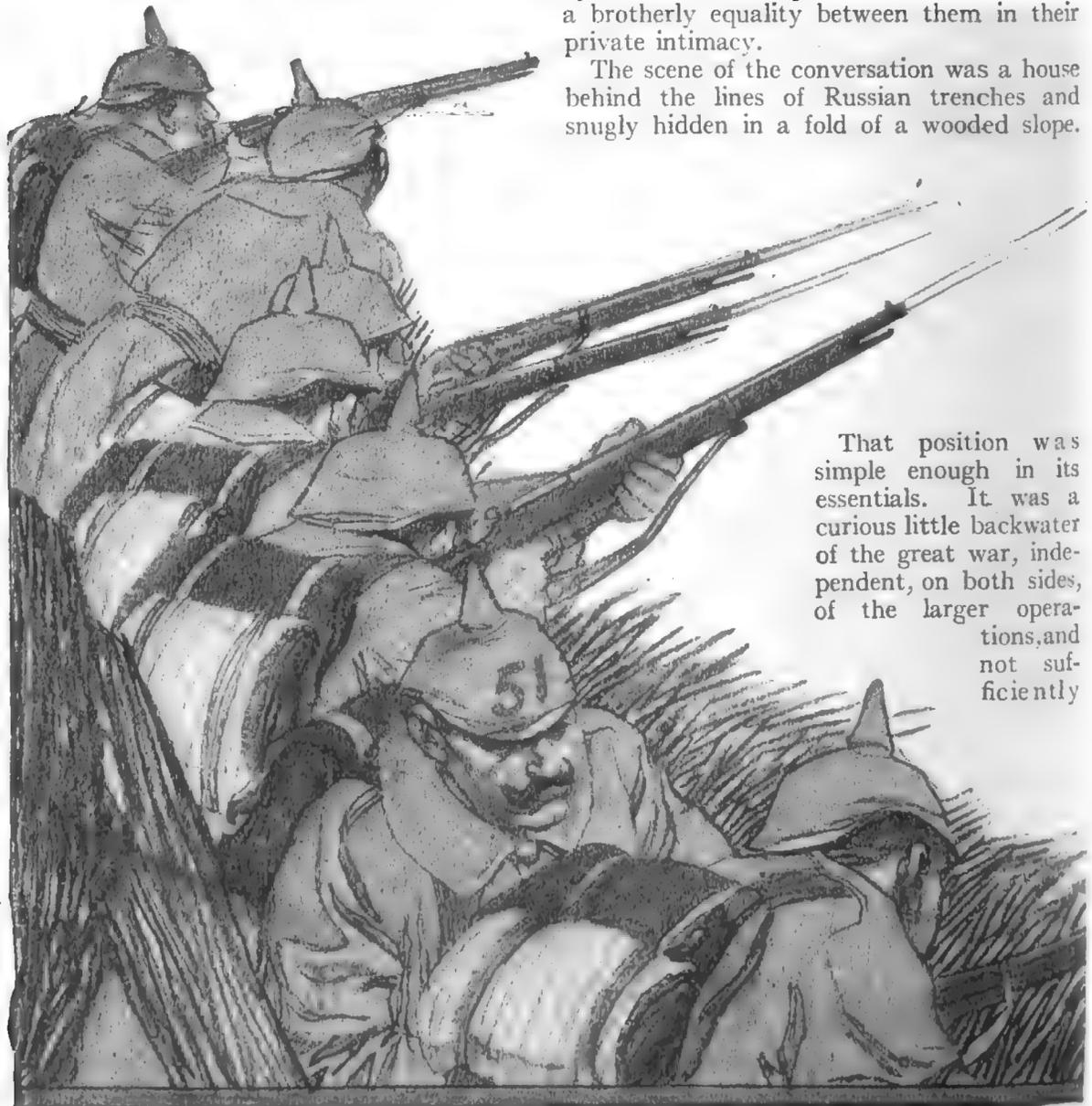
LEVOFF raised his eyes from the chess-board in front of him to glance at Muravine, who was reflectively tapping a map with the end of a pen. "No good, my dear Boris. Unless you can show me some method of doubling my forces, or how to

dispose them in two places at once, you must withdraw your wistful gaze from the hills."

"I suppose so," the other replied. "I suppose we must just wait for their attack when the river goes down, but it seems rather tame strategy."

Levoff was the senior in rank and some years the elder, but family ties, knit closer by their comradeship in war, had established a brotherly equality between them in their private intimacy.

The scene of the conversation was a house behind the lines of Russian trenches and snugly hidden in a fold of a wooded slope.



That position was simple enough in its essentials. It was a curious little backwater of the great war, independent, on both sides, of the larger operations, and not sufficiently

important to figure in the public bulletins, even if the local conditions had not condemned it to long weeks of featureless inactivity. The function of Levoff's command, not very many hundreds strong, was to serve as a screen to a small town that lay some miles behind the entrenched position. The town was not of sufficient military importance to hold in really large force, and he had been informed that the exigencies of wider operations elsewhere precluded any probability of his reinforcement. Its occupation by the enemy was to be delayed and made as expensive as possible—all the better, of course, if it could be prevented. For the rest, he would be left alone to play his own hand as best he could.

The falling of the river, until which event nothing more vigorous on either side could be undertaken than sniping and occasional mild bombardment, was a process of Nature that, in this particular stream, was accomplished each year in season with astonishing rapidity.

Muravine put away the map and joined his chief in his study of the chess-board.

"Not such a dreary deadlock as the real thing," he



observed. "Why can't they take our knight?"

"They can, if they like, but in any case I think their position is becoming untenable. We ought to push in their left wing and crush them."

"I am glad," Muravine remarked. "It may seem absurd, but the winning of the game is coming to assume some actual military importance."

"How so?" Levoff asked. "The playing of it is of some use if it helps to keep the men amused, but what is the particular significance of winning?"

"Moral," Muravine replied. "To-day I overheard a scrap of conversation from a sergeant who doesn't know a queen from a bishop: 'Our Levoff will beat them in the game and he will beat them in the battle. He's not going to let us down.'"

"But if I should in the one case, I might in the other. Quite fair reasoning."

"It is a sort of superstition among them that you never will let them down anywhere. As a 'spiritual factor' I rate that confidence high."

"I agree," Levoff answered. "We must certainly win the game. Fortunately, I think there is not much danger."

The contest in miniature, which, in its turn, threatened a possible reaction on the graver issue, owed its origin to the actual position in the field. During the long weeks

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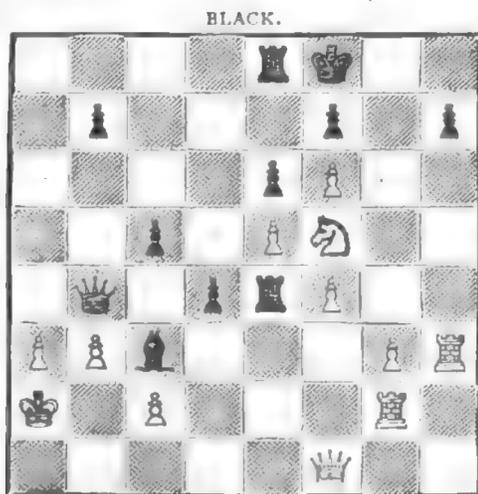


of enforced waiting in the trenches any device was welcome that might relieve the monotony and keep the men from mere idle brooding on their inactivity. Levoff was himself an enthusiastic chess-player, but his first attempts to arouse among his command an interest in his own favourite pastime had not been very successful, till one day, while wondering how the enemy was dealing with the problem of recreation, it occurred to him to throw out a feeler. By his order, a white disc, bearing the cabalistic lettering, in bold black, "E2—E4," was hoisted in view of the enemy, and its appearance was greeted by a crackle of rifle fire, as though it had been taken for an invitation to a display of marksmanship.

The following day, however, the signal "E7—E5," transmitted by the enemy in similar form, showed that the challenge, according to its true intent in the German chess notation, had been taken up. Pawn to king's fourth had been played as the opening move on each side in a game that was destined to have consequences of an importance entirely unforeseen. Thereafter, each day at noon, a move was signalled by the side whose turn it was to play, and the position on the chess-board developed a growing complication. Thus the fortunes on the mimic field had come to be related to those of the real strife by something more than the mere analogy of chess to war.

Levoff looked at his watch. "We ought to get their move soon, though I don't think they have got a good defence."

When, punctually to time, an orderly from the trenches brought the expected message, Levoff deciphered the move and made it on the board:—



WHITE.
White to play and win.

The two men looked at it, surprised and puzzled.

"Surely there must be some mistake," Muravine observed; "they can't intend to throw away their queen!"

"It is the move they have sent, at all events," Levoff answered. "And not such a bad move as it looks," he added, after a little further examination of its effect. "If we take the queen, we are mated in the corner—and with that wretched bobbin of yours of all pieces!"

He had lately lost one of the black rooks belonging to his set of men, and the "wretched bobbin" was a black cotton-reel supplied as a substitute by Muravine.

"Well, if we can't take the queen, why not attack their left wing as you intended? It seems to me that if we take the pawn with our rook, they can't avoid the mate."

"That is no good, either," Levoff answered. "If we take the pawn, they force us to take the queen, and the bobbin still mates. It is the same old German tactics—an attack in mass to break through the line at any sacrifice."

For an hour he pored and grunted without result, and at last declared an intention of clearing his head by some exercise.

"I wish you would have another look for that missing rook," he said, as he went out. "That stupid thing is maddeningly baulking when one is trying to think out a difficult position."

When he had gone, Muravine made a conscientious but vain search for the missing piece. Then the idea occurred to him to attempt the manufacture of some more plausible substitute. He was clever with his fingers and had some inventiveness. He began by cutting the right length of cardboard cylinder from an empty cartridge-case to serve as a framework. Then, having kneaded up with lamp-black the wax of a candle end to the right degree of blackness and plasticity, he modelled, with much patient skill, a surprisingly exact reproduction of the missing rook. "But for the difference in weight, I don't believe he could tell one from the other!" he exclaimed, with pride, as he placed the surviving genuine rook beside the counterfeit of his own creation. Then he replaced them on their proper squares to await the return of Levoff.

The latter noticed the substitution at once. "Good man! Where on earth did you find it?" He complimented Muravine on his skill, when he learnt the truth of the case, and resumed his study of the position with restored serenity.



" THE DAWN OF A HAPPY IDEA SHOWED ITSELF IN HIS FACE."

This time, either because of the removal of the little stumbling-block, or because the fresh air had really cleared his brain, his study of the board seemed to afford him a growing satisfaction. The dawn of a happy idea showed itself in his face. The smile gradually broadened. He began to move the pieces with an eager hand, and presently it descended on the table with a triumphant thump. "Got them, by thunder! Counter-

stroke in their own best style of massed attack! Heavy casualties to us, but their left wing driven in and crushed, and the whole defence annihilated!"

He beamed with good-humour and satisfaction while he demonstrated the soundness of the winning combination to Muravine. "Your little masterpiece made all the difference." He picked up Muravine's rook to admire afresh the ingenuity of its

contrivance. "It only wants to be weighted to make it perfect."

"I can easily do that with some pellets of shot," Muravine answered.

But Levoff did not appear to have heard the remark. He seemed to have become suddenly unconscious of Muravine's presence. He sat perfectly motionless, the rook poised in one hand, and his eyes staring at nothing with the vacancy of one in a cataleptic seizure. He remained so long like this that Muravine laid a hand on his sleeve. The touch brought him out of his dream with a start. He got up briskly from his chair and pulled out his watch. "How long will it take me to get to Fedropol?"

"Fedropol!" Muravine echoed in astonishment. "I don't think a car could do it under three hours, and you couldn't count on trains for any part of the journey."

"I must have a car in ten minutes. Petrol for twelve hours, and plenty of rugs."

"I will explain to-morrow," he added. "I expect to return before noon. If not, here is the move we are to signal."

He wrote it down and strode out with a firm, purposeful tread, leaving Muravine to telephone the necessary orders and speculate vainly as to what could have moved Levoff so suddenly to a distant excursion.

Whether at chess or war, Levoff was never quite so dangerous an opponent as when his manner showed an expansive good-humour. Muravine observed the signs from the moment of his chief's return.

"Tea! Hot tea in buckets!" he cried, jovially, "and cigarettes, Boris; I finished my last twenty miles down the road."

His wants were soon supplied.

"And now, Boris, the map; and I will make amends for keeping your curiosity on the rack. I couldn't explain yesterday; first, because the idea that carried me off to Fedropol came too suddenly; and, secondly, because I couldn't tell until I got there how much it might be worth."

He paused to finish a cup of tea. "It all started from the enemy's last move with the queen. Just trace the chain of causation. He plays a move that puzzles me, and because I am puzzled I get annoyed at the loss of one of my chess-men. That leads to your contrivance, and that, in turn, to—but in this case the beginning is not the right place to start from."

He bent over the map. "Let us come back to our present military position for the

moment. I think we agreed that it left us three possible courses."

Muravine assented.

"One, to wait in our present lines and trust to superior fighting qualities to defend them against the larger numbers; two, to fall back to here." He indicated a position on the map, using his cigarette as a pointer.

"That we rejected," Muravine interposed, "as being no better than where we are now."

"Then there remains your wild-cat scheme of a night march round the shoulder of this hill, and a sudden appearance on their flank somewhere about here." Again the cigarette did duty.

"That we dismissed because of our opinion that it *was* wild-cat."

"And our grounds for that opinion?" Levoff asked, as though to test the accuracy of his junior's memory.

"That, since it must be as obvious to the enemy as to ourselves that we dare not divide our forces, he would know, from the moment that we were disclosed upon his flank, that our present lines were left undefended, and he would sweep past them to here." He indicated a locality on the map. "Do you wish me to enumerate all the disastrous consequences?"

"It is not necessary," Levoff answered. "Now take the data we know the enemy to possess, and consider his reasoning from them. He *knows* we cannot get reinforcements; he *knows*, within narrow limits, our numbers; he assumes, quite rightly, that we shall not divide our force; he reasons that, since we cannot be in two places at once, we shall not be by the river if we appear upon the hill."

"Quite rightly," Muravine interposed.

"*Quite wrongly*," Levoff contradicted. "I reasoned yesterday that, because I saw upon the chess-board the lost rook, it was not at the same moment hidden away in some odd corner—and *I was wrong*."

Muravine caught his drift quickly. "A legion of scarecrows to deceive the enemies' eagles! And by what magic do you propose to transport your army of dummies without using your live men to carry them?"

Levoff picked up the imitation rook from the chess-board and repeated his action of the day before, weighing it in his hand as though it were a letter that might require extra stamping.

"That was where your contrivance gave me a second suggestion. If it could look so solid and be so light, why not extend the principle? The fault of a chess-man would become the supreme merit of a counterfeit army."

Muravine's face expressed scepticism, but Levoff continued: "If the thing could be done at all, it was Mirolosky who could do it, and it must be done quickly, if at all. Hence my sudden dash to Fedropol. I found Mirolosky, who, by the way, has almost given up scientific toys since he took to army contracting, and got him interested, with the result that one entire factory is at present busy with the production of a new pattern of toy soldier, not made of lead, *bien entendu*."

"Then you have definitely decided to attempt the operation?" Muravine asked.

"Unless, when you have seen our first recruit, you can show me some valid objection."

From a corner, where he had placed it on entering, he produced a long, thin parcel, and, when he had removed the wrapping of brown paper, revealed an object resembling a neatly rolled-up umbrella, but about twice the usual length and half the usual weight. He stretched a thin wire across one part of the room, about three feet from the ground, and clipped the umbrella-shaped article to it in a perpendicular position. He took out of his pocket what, from its appearance, might have been a metal drinking-flask, and, with the india-rubber tube of a bicycle pump, connected its screw nozzle with the other part of the apparatus.

Muravine followed closely, while Levoff, consciously perhaps, assumed the manner of a scientific lecturer demonstrating before a public audience. "The flask which I hold in my hand contains two chemical substances which, upon sliding this little knob with my thumb, will combine to the generation of a large volume of gas. This envelope is made of a material similar to that of the coloured air-balloons with which you must have been familiar in childhood, only very much tougher. I am now going to slide the knob, when the gas will immediately begin to inflate the envelope until, upon full distension, it assumes the appearance that, in a few moments, you will have an opportunity to observe."

He pressed the knob and the envelope began to stir slowly and bulge in places, shapeless at first, till, with increasing pressure of the gas, the miracle hastened, and there grew before their eyes the presentment of a Russian infantryman. Mirolosky, in a humorous moment, had, with a few deft touches of the brush, indicated a face, an addition entirely useless for the ulterior purpose, but irresistibly comic in its expression of stupid bewilderment. It had

the appearance of a property doll from a Christmas pantomime rather than a serious implement of war. A sense of the incongruity overcame Muravine, and his merriment infected Levoff, till they staggered about the room in fits of uncontrollable laughter.

"To march against the Germans with that ludicrous monster! Are we a travelling circus, or a part of the Czar's forces?"

Their conference soon grew serious again, as Levoff explained the arrangement of supporting wires by which, with the help of the dummies, two men would appear as a line of twelve, or four as a solid square of more than a hundred.

He reverted once more to the map. "Remember that at this point, where our show would first become visible to the enemy, it would be seen through glasses, or possibly from the air. I am not going to take my dummies under a white flag to parley with the enemy at close quarters. Imagine the visual effect when machine-guns and other dummy trimmings are added. Do you think they will believe their own eyes?"

"I should think it was about an even chance," Muravine replied, cautiously.

"If the chance falls in our favour, his next move will be an advance on this position with all his forces."

"That I consider much more certain," Muravine assented.

"Very well, then. He will expect to find these trenches deserted. And he will. We shall be in concealment here and here. An hour later the position will be this, or something like it." He made some crosses and arrows in pencil on the map. "How do you forecast the result?"

"Checkmate," Muravine answered. "If you once get to that position it means annihilation for the enemy."

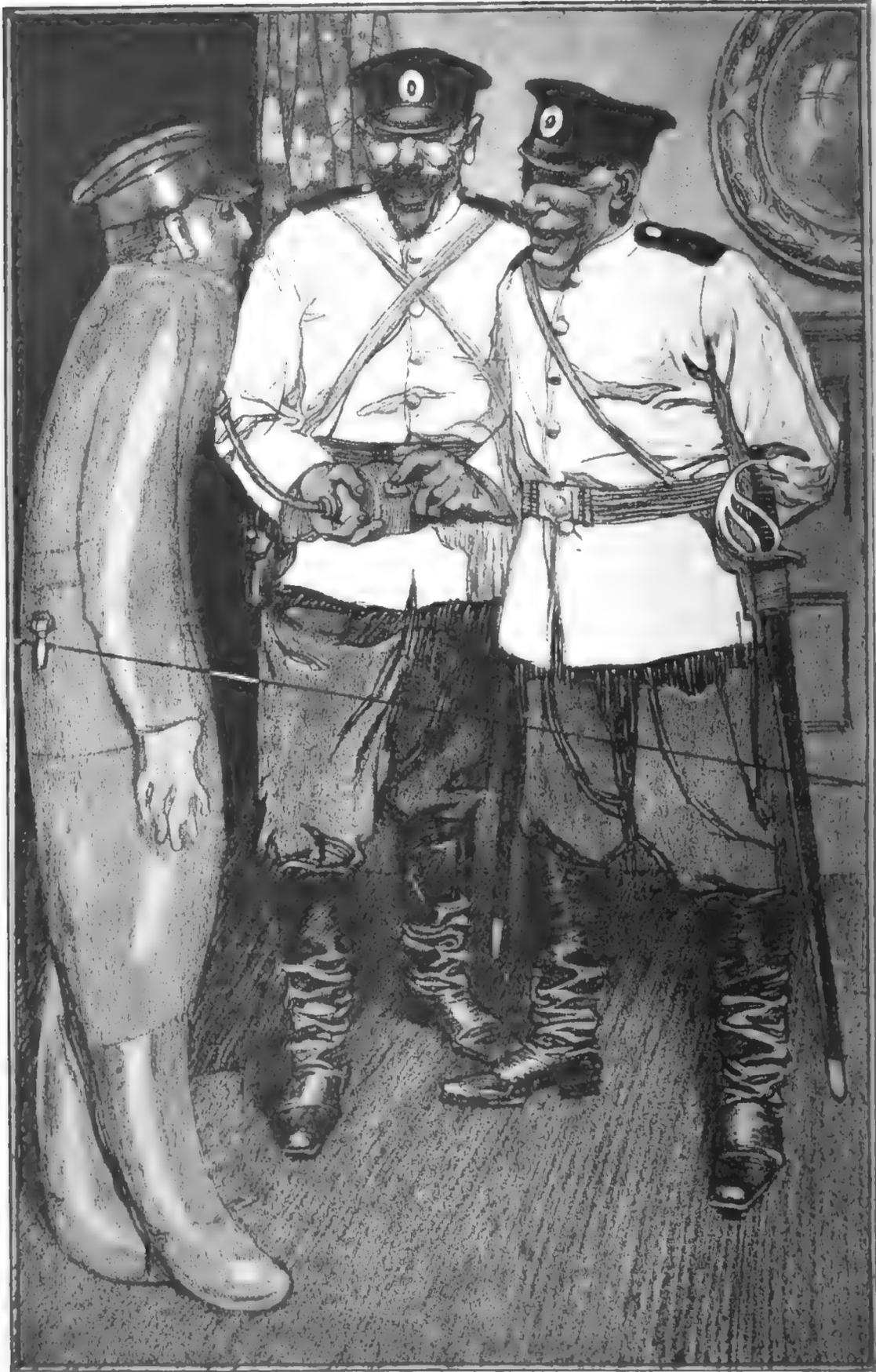
Levoff smiled a grim satisfaction. "I think our fellows could be trusted to do some pretty work with the bayonet."

Muravine still stared doubtfully at the map. "The element of the fantastic in the scheme makes you jib?" Levoff asked.

"Not so much that," the other answered. "I was only thinking that, for a serious operation of war, it seems rather a toss-up."

"My dear Boris," Levoff replied, "that is precisely its justification. It is 'Heads we win, tails we lose nothing.' If the ruse should be discovered, we shall fight at no greater disadvantage than if we had never tried it."

During the days that followed, a change revealed itself in the mental atmosphere of



"WITH INCREASING PRESSURE OF THE GAS THE MIRACLE HASTENED, AND THERE GREW BEFORE THEIR EYES THE PRESENTMENT OF A RUSSIAN INFANTRYMAN."

the force. The same occasions for boredom were present, but the boredom itself gave place to a quickening sense of expectancy. Though nothing definite was known among the ranks, and only a few knew the secret of the packages delivered from Mirolosky's factory, there was a general conviction that something exciting was in the wind.

Even the knowledge that in the chess contest (for this was no part of the secret) he had "got them" in a few more moves contributed, in its degree, to the confidence with which the greater issue was awaited.

Then the day came when Muravine reported that the subsidence of the river had begun in earnest, and a simple "For to-night, then," was sufficient order to set the well-oiled wheels of the scheme in motion. A stealthy evacuation of the trenches, a silent march in the darkness, and before dawn the most difficult part of the manœuvre was accomplished.

At their chosen point of observation, Levoff and Muravine lay stretched upon the near slope of a small mound, their field-glasses projecting just above the ridge. Every preparation was completed, and, for at least the next two hours, no more could be done. But long before that they would know the way it was going to turn. The next half-hour or so should settle whether it was heads or tails with the coin on whose throw their chances were staked.

Levoff kept his glass held with a steady hand to his eyes. A slight compression of the lips was the only sign of excitement. Levoff, who thumped and swore over the chess-board, could abide with silent composure the living issue. To Muravine the rack of uncertainty was almost unbearable. His face had never paled with fear, but it was white now in the anguish of suspense. His hands trembled as he unhooked his watch and laid it on the ground. His eyes shifted with nervous frequency from field-glass to watch, each time more anxiously, as the one still revealed no sign of promise, and the other an ever-dwindling store of precious minutes. Mentally he chose a figure on the watch-face as the limit of hope. When the long-hand passed that point, he would accept the issue as decided against them. The daylight grew fuller, and the pointer drew near the limit. He raised the field-glass for a last scanning of the distance. When he lowered it again, the pointer had passed the mark, and he closed the glass, to wait for a

signal from Levoff that it was no use watching any longer. For another five minutes by the watch Levoff kept his glass fixed on its objective. Then he turned to his junior with a quiet smile: "It is heads, Boris."

Muravine's shaky fingers blurred the focus, but he saw enough. He dropped the glass with the light of coming battle in his eyes. Levoff lighted a cigarette and observed: "When you have left your opponent a fatally tempting move, the great moments are while he is making up his mind. When once he is committed, there is less interest in the last few moves that force the mate."

He looked once more through the glass and then replaced it in its case. A momentary expression of pity crossed his face, and he muttered softly, "Poor devils!"

Muravine winced slightly as he tried to move his wounded arm, but his pale face was happy with a deep contentment. Levoff's softened to a paternal tenderness as he looked up from the report he was writing.

"Shall we have him in here, or would it worry you, my dear boy? It will only be an hour or two before we get him shipped off after the rest."

"By all means bring him in here," Muravine answered. "It will interest me."

Levoff rose to receive his captive, and offered him refreshment.

"If there is any matter in which I can serve you, you have only to command," he added, with chivalrous courtesy.

The other bowed a grave acknowledgment. "I entrust my men with confidence to your humanity. For myself, I will ask one small favour. Tell me, if it involves no military secret, where, in the name of magic, you got your reinforcements?"

"From Fedropol; from the factory of Mirolosky and Company," Levoff answered.

In spite of his pain, Muravine had, out of decency, to turn his face away when the dummy came to play its part in the explanation, and Mirolosky's comic touches produced a faint, disgusted smile even on the face of the captive officer.

He inspected the imitation rook in its turn.

"On that field also I must hoist the white flag," he said, as he laid it down again. "That move of our queen did not turn out so well as we expected. As a matter of fact, it lost us the game."

"As a matter of fact," Levoff said, with slow emphasis, "*it lost you the battle.*"

(The solution of the end-game in this story will be given next month.)

“IRREGULAR FORCES.”

THE following is the solution of the end-game referred to in the chess story entitled “Irregular Forces,” published in our last number :—

1. Q to R 6, R to K 8 (best) (a) ; 2. Q to Q 6, ch., K. to Kt sq. ; 3. Kt to K 7, ch., K to B sq. (best) ; 4. Kt to Kt 6, double check, K to Kt sq. ; 5. Q to B 8, ch., R takes Q ; 6. Kt to K 7, ch., K to R sq. ; 7. R takes P, ch., K takes R ; 8. R to R 2, mate.

(a). 1 , P takes Q ; 2. R takes P, K to Kt sq. ; 3. R to Kt 7, ch., K to B sq. ; 4. Kt to R 6, Q takes Kt P, ch. ; 5. P takes Q, R to K 7, ch. ; 6. R takes R and mates on the next move.