

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

**IN THE DAY OF
ADVERSITY**

John Bloundelle-Burton
In the Day of Adversity

«Public Domain»

Bloundelle-Burton J.

In the Day of Adversity / J. Bloundelle-Burton — «Public Domain»,

© Bloundelle-Burton J.

© Public Domain

Содержание

PREFACE	5
THE FIRST PERIOD	6
CHAPTER I.	6
CHAPTER II.	10
CHAPTER III.	14
CHAPTER IV.	18
CHAPTER V.	21
CHAPTER VI.	26
CHAPTER VII.	30
CHAPTER VIII.	34
CHAPTER IX.	38
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	40

John Bloundelle-Burton In the Day of Adversity

PREFACE

Those who are acquainted with the delightful *Mémoires Secrets de M. Le Comte de Bussy Rabutin* (particularly the supplements to them), and with Rousset's *Histoire de Louvois*, will, perhaps, recognise the inspiration of this story. Those who are not so acquainted with these works will, I trust, still be able to take some interest in the adventures of Georges St. Georges.

J. B. – B.

THE FIRST PERIOD

CHAPTER I. "THE KING'S COMMAND."

All over Franche-Comté the snow had fallen for three days unceasingly, yet through it for those three days a man – a soldier – had ridden, heading his course north, for Paris.

Wrapped in his cloak, and prevented from falling by his bridle arm, he bore a little child – a girl some three years old – on whom, as the cloak would sometimes become disarranged, he would look down fondly, his firm, grave features relaxing into a sad smile as the blue eyes of the little creature gazed upward and smiled into his own face. Then he would whisper a word of love to it, press it closer to his great breast, and again ride on.

For three days the snow had fallen; was falling when he left the garrison of Pontarlier and threaded his way through the pine woods on the Jura slopes; fell still as, with the wintry night close at hand, he approached the city of Dijon. Yet, except to sleep at nights, to rest himself, the child, and the horse, he had gone on and on unstopping, or only stopping to shoot once a wolf that, maddened with hunger, had sprung out at him and endeavoured to leap to his saddle; and once to cut down two footpads – perhaps poor wretches, also maddened with hunger – who had striven to stop his way.

On and on and on through the unceasing snow he had gone with the child still held fast to his bosom, resting the first night at Poligny, since the snow was so heavy on the ground that his horse could go no further, and another at Dôle for the same reason, until now he drew near to Dijon.

"A short distance to travel in three days," he muttered to himself, as, afar off, his eye caught the gleam of a great beacon flaring surlily through the snow-laden air – the beacon on the southern watchtower of the city walls – "a short distance. Yet I have done my best. Have obeyed orders. Now let me see for further instructions."

There was still sufficient light left in the wintry gloom to read by, whereon, shifting the child a little as he drew rein – it needed not much drawing, since the good horse beneath him could hardly progress beyond the slowest walk, owing to the accumulated snow – he took from his holster a letter, and, passing over the beginning of it, turned to the last leaf and read:

"At Dijon you will stay at the château of my good friend and subject the Marquis Phélypeaux, avoiding all inns; at Troyes, at the manoir of Madame la Marquise de Roquemaure; at Melun, if you have to halt there, at the château of Monsieur de Riverac. Between these, if forced to rest, you are to select the auberges which offer; but at these three towns you are to repose yourself as stated. Above all, fail not to present yourself at the manoir of Roquemaure. The marquise will deliver to your keeping a message for me. Therefore, be sure you travel by the route indicated, and not by that which passes by Sémur, Tonnerre, and Sens. On this, I pray God to have you, M. Georges St. Georges, in his holy keeping. Written at Paris, the 9th of December, 1687.

"Signé, Louis.

Soussigné, Louvois."

"So," said M. Georges St. Georges to himself, as he replaced the letter in his holster, "it is to the Marquis Phélypeaux that I am to go. So be it. It may be better for the child than at an inn. And I cannot gossip, or, if I do, only to my host, who will doubtless retail it all to the king." Then addressing himself to the watchman on the southern gate, he cried:

"Open there, and let me in!"

"'Tis too late," the man replied, looking down at him through the fast-gathering night. "None enter Dijon now after four of the evening. Ten thousand devils! why could you not have come half an hour earlier? Yet there is a good auberge outside the walls, and –"

"Open, I say!" called up the horseman. "I ride by the king's orders, and have to present myself to the Marquis Phélypeaux. Open, I say!"

"*Tiens!*" exclaimed the watchman, peering down at him through the gray snow and rime with which was now mixed the blackness of the oncoming night. "You ride in the king's name and would see the marquis. *C'est autre chose!* Yet I must be careful. Wait, I will descend. Draw up to the *grille* of the gate."

The horseman did as the watchman bid him, looking down once at the child in his arms, whose face had become uncovered for a moment, and smiling again into its eyes, while he muttered, "Sweet, ere long you shall have a softer couch"; then, as the *grille* opened and the watchman's ruddy face – all blotched with the consumption of frequent *pigeolets* of Macon and other wines – appeared at the grating, he bent down toward him as though to submit his own face to observation.

"Your name and following?" grunted the man.

"Georges St. Georges. Lieutenant in the Chevaux-Légers of the Nivernois. In garrison at the Fort de Joux, between Verrières and Pontarlier. Recalled to Paris by order of the king. Ordered to visit the Marquis Phélypeaux. Are you answered, friend?"

"What do you carry in your arms? It seems precious by the way you clasp it to you."

"It is precious. It is a child – my child."

"*Tiens!* A strange burden for a soldier *en route* from the frontier to Paris. Where is the mother?"

"In her grave! Now open the gate."

For answer the bolts and bars were heard creaking, and presently one half of the great door swung back to admit the rider. And he, dismounting, led his horse through it by one hand, while with the other he clasped his child to his breast beneath the cloak.

Standing in the warder's lodge was a woman – doubtless his wife – who had heard the conversation; for as St. Georges entered she came forward and exclaimed gently:

"A cold, long ride, monsieur, for such as that," and she touched with her finger the rounded back of the child as it lay curled up on his arm beneath the cloak. Then, still femininely, she went on: "Ah! let me see the *pauvrette*," and without resistance from him she drew back the cloak and gazed at it. "Mon Dieu!" she exclaimed, "a pretty little thing. Poor little *bebé*. And the mother dead, monsieur?" her eyes filling with tears as she spoke.

"Dead," he replied – "dead. In giving birth to her. I am father and mother both. God help her!"

The woman stooped down and kissed the little thing, whose soft blue eyes smiled up at her; then she said:

"The Marquis Phélypeaux is a solitary – dwelling alone. There is little provision for children there. What will monsieur do?"

"As I have done for three years – attend to all its wants myself. There is none other. It had a nurse in the fort; but I could not leave it nor bring her with me. In Paris I may find another. Now tell me where the house of this marquis is?" and he made a movement to go forward.

"And its name, monsieur?" the kindly woman asked, still touched with pity for the little motherless thing being carried on so long and cold a journey. Two or three of her own children were already in their beds of rags that were none too clean, but they, at least, were housed and warm, and not like this one.

"Her name," he replied, "is Dorine. It was her mother's." Then turning to the warder, who stood by, he exclaimed again, "Now direct me to the marquis's, I beg you."

The man's method of direction was to seize by the ear a boy who at that moment had come up – he was one of his own numerous brood – and to bid him lead the monsieur to the marquis's.

"'Tis but a pistol shot," he said, "at the foot of the Rampe. Be off!" to his son, "away! Escort the gentleman."

Certainly it was no great distance from the southern gate, yet when Monsieur St. Georges had arrived there, still leading his horse by one hand and carrying his precious burden by the other, or by the other arm, the house had so deserted a look that it seemed as though he was hardly likely to be able to carry out the orders of the king and his minister to quarter himself upon the marquis instead of going to an inn. Therefore, he gazed up at the mansion before which he stood waiting, wondering what kind of man was this who dwelt in it.

The house itself was large and vast, having innumerable windows giving on to a large, open, bare *place* in front of it, while the great *porte cochère* had a lock which looked as though it would resist an attack either of battering rams or gunpowder if brought against it. But the blinds, or shutters, were all closed; the great door itself looked as though it had not been opened for a century; the knocker – a Christ upon the cross! – as though it had not been raised for as long a time.

"Phélypeaux," muttered St. Georges to himself. "Phélypeaux! I know the name; what do I know of him? Let me think. Ha! I have it. A soldier like myself. Also another, a brother, a priest, Bishop of Lodève – which is my host, I wonder? For choice the soldier, if all is true of the bishop that is told. *Mon enfant*," turning to the urchin, "is the marquis soldier or divine?"

The boy laughed, then said:

"Divine, monsieur. But *en retraite*. Oh! *avez ça*– they say droll things. Only I am young – I do not know." Whereon he grinned. Then he exclaimed: "*Voilà!* the door is opening."

It was, in truth, or rather a wicket in the door large enough to admit a man who should stoop, or the urchin by the side of St. Georges; but certainly by no means large enough to admit of the passage of his horse if that was also to be entertained for the night.

At that wicket appeared a face, wine-stained and blotchy, but not so good-humoured-looking as that of the watchman at the southern gate. Instead, a scowling face, as of a man on whom good liquor had no improving effect, but, rather, had soured and embittered him.

"What want you?" he asked, staring out moodily at the soldier before him and at his horse, and observing the great sword, hat, and cloak of the former with – beneath the latter – its burden; and also the military trappings of the steed. "What want you?"

"An audience of the marquis. By order of the king. Also food and lodging by the same authority. *Ma foi!* if I had my way I should not demand it. There is a good auberge over there to all appearances," nodding his head toward the white-walled inn on the other side of the *place*, before which hung a bush and on which was painted the whole length of the house: "*L'Ours de Bourgogne. Logement à pied et à cheval.*" "Doubtless I could be well accommodated."

"Take your horse there, at any rate," said the sour-faced man; "there is no accommodation for *it*. Then come back. We will see later about you." And turning to the boy he cried, gesticulating with his hands: "*Va t'en*. Be off!"

The lad did not wait to be bidden a second time to depart, but scampered across the open *place*, while St. Georges, regarding the morose-looking man in front of him, said: "My friend, neither your courtesy nor your hospitality is of the best. Does your master bid you treat all who come to visit him in this manner?"

"I am obeying my master," the other replied; "the only one I acknowledge – when I parley with you. Show me your warrant, however, for coming to this house."

"There it is," replied St. Georges; "take it to your master, bid him read it, and then bring me whatever message he may send me. Perhaps" – regarding the servitor through the wicket, as he gave him the paper – "if the master is like the man I had best wait until he has read the king's letter ere I seek shelter for my horse. It may be that I shall have to demand it for myself also at the inn."

Then, to his amazement, he saw that the other had opened the leaves of the king's letter and was calmly reading them. "Fellow!" he exclaimed, "how dare you make so bold? You read a letter from the king to me – to be shown to your master – "

"Pish!" replied the other. "Be silent. I am Phélypeaux."

"You!" exclaimed the soldier, stepping back – "you!" and his eye fell on the rusty-brown clothing of the man half in, half out, the wicket. "You!"

"Yes, I. Now go and put your horse up at the inn. Then come back. But stay – what have you beneath your arm?"

"A child."

"A child! Does Louis think I keep a nursery? What are we to do with the child while you stay here?"

"I will attend to that. If you give me a bed the child will share it, and if you have some white bread and milk it is enough for its food."

"Best get that at the 'Ours,'" replied he who said he was Phélypeaux. "Bread I have, but no milk. *Ma foi!* there is no babes' food here. Now, I counsel you, go seek the inn. Your horse may take a chill. Then come back. And" – as the soldier turned to lead his animal across the snow-covered, deserted *place*– "leave the child there. The *patronne* is a motherly creature with half a dozen of her own brood. 'Twill be better there than here. Ring loudly when you return – I am somewhat deaf," and he banged the wicket in St. Georges's face.

"Humph!" muttered the latter, as he crossed to the inn; "the counsel is good. That seems no place for a child. Yet, how to leave it? Still, it is best. It has slept often with its nurse; maybe will sleep well at the inn. Well, let me see what the *patronne* is like."

He entered the yard of the "Ours" as he meditated thus, engaged a stall for the animal, saw it fed and rubbed down, and, then taking his pistols and the king's letter from the holsters and putting them in his belt, entered the hostelry and called for a cup of wine. And, seeing that the woman who served him – evidently the mistress from the manner in which she joked with one or two customers and gave directions to a servant – was a motherly looking woman, he asked her if the child he carried would be safe there for the night?

"A child," she exclaimed, "a child, and in the arms of a soldier! Why, sir, whence come you with a child? *Mon Dieu!* Of all burdens, soldiers rarely carry such as that."

"Nevertheless, I carry such a one. I am on the road from Pontarlier to Paris with my child, and I sleep to-night across the way at the Marquis Phélypeaux's. It seems there is no accommodation there for infants."

"*Hein!*" screamed the woman, turning to the customers in the *place*; "you hear that?" Then addressing herself to St. Georges, she continued: "You speak well, monsieur; that is no place for children. *Ma foi!* the old *scélérat* would be as like to eat it."

CHAPTER II. HOSPITALITY!

"Who, then, is Phélypeaux?" asked St. Georges as he sat himself down in front of the great kitchen fire – the kitchen serving always in a Burgundian inn as the general place of assembly and serving room. "Who is Phélypeaux?"

"Monsieur does not, in truth, know?" she replied, with a glance at the customers – one a mousquetaire, himself *en route* to Bar to join his regiment, and the other evidently a shopkeeper of the place. The former had risen and saluted St. Georges as he entered, seeing by his accoutrements and lace¹ that he was an officer, and now he joined in the conversation deferentially.

"In truth, monsieur, he is a rarity, an oddity. He is priest and bishop both – "

"So," interrupted St. Georges, "he is the Bishop of Lodève. I have heard of him. He has a brother, I think, comrade, who follows our profession."

"That is true, monsieur. One who will go far. 'Twas but last year the king sent him ambassador to Cologne; now they say he goes to Turin."

"So, so. But this one here – this bishop? And if Bishop of Lodève, what does he do in Burgundy?"

"Villainies, *scélératesses*," interrupted the hostess, turning away from the fowl she was basting on the spit and emphasizing her remarks with her great wooden spoon. "Oh! figure to yourself – he is a villain. *Ma foi, oui!* A bishop! Ha! A true one. Boasts he believes not in a God, yet rules Languedoc with a rod of iron since Cardinal Bonzi fell off his perch; entertains the wickedest *mondaines* of Louis's court as they pass through Lodève; has boys to sing to him while he dines and – and – But there," she concluded as she turned to the fowl again; "he is a Phélypeaux. That tells all. They are sacred with the king."

"But why?" asked St. Georges, as he rose from his seat – "but why? What does he here if he rules Languedoc, and why should Phélypeaux be a charmed name? Tell me before I go."

He had made arrangements with the good woman to leave his child there for the night, she swearing by many saints that it should sleep with her own and be as carefully guarded and as precious as they were. So he had confided it to her care, saying: "Remember, 'tis motherless, and, besides, is all I have in the world, all I have left to me of my dead wife. Remember that, I beseech you, as you are a mother yourself"; and she, being a mother and a true one, promised. Therefore it was now sleeping peacefully upstairs, its little arms around the neck of one of her own children.

"Why, monsieur, why is he here and why does he bear a charmed name?" repeated the other customer, the *bon bourgeois*, joining in the conversation for the first time. "I will tell you. First, he comes regularly to take his rights of seigniorage, his rents, his taxes, his fourths of all the produce of his vineyards and arable lands on our Côte d'Or. They are rich, these Phélypeaux; have been ever since the days of Charles the Bold, and they are greedy and grasping. Also they are great and powerful – they are of the Pontchartrain blood, and are of the court. One was minister to the late king under the cardinal. And for being bishop, *tiens!* he was priest under Mazarin, who had been a cavalryman, as monsieur is himself. It was Barberini who told him the gown was better than the sword. And it was Mazarin who made Phélypeaux bishop. To silence him, you understand, monsieur – to silence him. He knew too much."

"What did he know?" asked the soldier, lifting his cup to his lips for the last time, though with his eyes fixed on the *bourgeois* as he spoke.

¹ The various *chevaux-légers* had not as yet been put by Louis into uniform, as was the case a few years before with most of the French regiments.

"Ha! he knew much. The king's first love for La Beauvais – his first love – then for Marie de Mancini and for La Mothe Houdancourt. Also he knew Turenne and Condé – and also much more than the world knew or will ever know."

"Turenne and Condé!" St. Georges echoed. "Two great captains. Two great rivals and friends! So! Perhaps he will tell me something of them to-night. They are names for a soldier to respect. *Bon soir, la compagnie,*" and he made toward the door.

They wished him good-night, the hostess telling him to have no fear, the child should be well attended to, and the mousquetaire saluting him; then the latter said: "Monsieur rides north again tomorrow, as I heard him say. I too go forward to Bar. If monsieur permits, and since the roads are bad and often infested with vile characters, I will ride part way with him."

St. Georges looked at the young man; observed his stalwart frame – as big as his own – his honest face and clear gray eyes, the former ruddy with many a march and much exposure; then he said: "*Soit!* We will ride together; Bar is more than twenty leagues on the journey I have to make. We must part before it is reached. Still, let us set out together. At what hour do you leave?"

"As soon after daybreak as possible, monsieur, if that is convenient."

"It shall be. I will quit Phélypeaux at the dawn." Then St. Georges added aside: "Comrade, I leave here in the inn the two things dearest to me in the world – my child and horse. I confide them to you. Will you accept the trust until the morning?"

"With the greatest will, monsieur. Trust me. Ere I sleep to-night I will see that all is well with both. You may depend on me."

"So be it," replied St. Georges. "I do depend on you. Farewell till dawn," and he strode across the great, gaunt *place*, on which the snow still fell and lay.

"Ring loud!" the old man said, he muttered to himself; "well, here's for it," and he pulled a peal on the bell chain hanging by the side of the door that might have waked the dead. Then, as he stood there musing on why the king should have given him orders to put up at such a place as Phélypeaux's instead of enjoying the solid, if rough, comfort of a Burgundian inn, the wicket opened again and the old man's sour face appeared once more at it.

"So!" he said, "you have come back. And I perceive you have left the child behind you. 'Tis well. We have no room for children here. Come in, come in," he added snappishly.

Obeying an invitation given in none too warm a tone, St. Georges stepped through the wicket into the courtyard of the house – a place filled with snow that had lain there and increased since the first flake had fallen until now, and through which a thin path or track had been trodden from the great doorway to a smaller one that admitted to the house.

"You perceive," remarked Phélypeaux, "this is not a luxurious halting for you, monsieur. Still, the *chevaux-légers* are doubtless used to an absence of luxury."

"The *chevaux-légers* can make shift with anything," replied the soldier. And shrugging his shoulders as he spoke, he said: "*Monseigneur l'Évêque*, why do you imagine his Majesty has instructed me to become your guest for a night?"

He spoke without any of that respect usually shown to exalted members of the Church in the days of Louis XIV – a monarch who considered himself a religious man, and demanded that the most scrupulous reverence should be paid to all things ecclesiastical. But, in truth, the Bishop of Lodève was known to be a scandal to the sacred calling he belonged to; and now that Georges St. Georges was aware that he was face to face with the man himself, he refused to testify a respect for him that he could not feel.

"Humph! 'Monseigneur l'Évêque!' Ha! So you know me?" St. Georges nodded, whereon the other went on:

"Why the king has sent you to me? Eh? Perhaps because he thinks I am a good host, and because he loves his troops to be well treated. So I am a good host – only it is when I am in Languedoc.

Here, *malheureusement*, I must be perforce a bad one. I have no servants but those I have brought with me, and one or two women who look after the château during my absence."

He had by this time opened the door into the house and escorted his visitor into a large, desolate-looking saloon, on the walls of which the damp hung in huge beads and drops, and in which there was a fireplace of vast dimensions that gave the appearance of never having had a fire lighted in it for years. Yet before this fireplace there stood two great armchairs, as though to suggest that here was a comfortable, cosy spot in which to sit.

"We'll soon have a fire," said this strange creature, whereon he went to a corner of the room in which hung some arras, and, thrusting it aside, brought forth a handful of kindling wood, two or three green, newly cut logs of different sizes, and some shavings, to which he applied the tinder after he had thrown them all pell-mell into the grate together. Then, when the smoke which arose from the damp green wood had thoroughly permeated the whole of the room, he looked round at St. Georges and said:

"You were gone some while to the 'Ours.' Did you sup there?"

"Nay," replied the other, glancing at him through the smoke and by aid of the single candle by which the room was illuminated, for it was now night. "Nay, monseigneur, I thought to sup with you."

"And so you shall," exclaimed Phélypeaux, with an assumed air of hilarity – "and so you shall. Only – I cannot entertain you as in Languedoc. Now, if we were there –"

"Well," said the soldier, "we are not. We are in Burgundy. The land of good cheer. We must take what Burgundy offers."

"*Hélas!* it offers little. At least in this house. However, I will see." Saying which he opened a door at the other end of the room, and calling, "Pierre, Pierre!" loudly, he cried out, after a harsh voice had answered him from some distant room: "Bring some supper for Monsieur St. Georges and myself. For Monsieur St. Georges and myself. You understand! For Monsieur St. Georges and myself."

"Why emphasize 'Monsieur St. Georges' so strongly, monseigneur?" the other demanded. "The respected servitor can hardly care much whether he bring supper for you and Monsieur St. Georges or for you and Monsieur the dev – I beg your pardon, monseigneur."

The Bishop of Lodève laughed a kind of grim, uncanny laugh as St. Georges said this, then he remarked:

"Surely you don't believe in – in – the gentleman you were about to mention. Let me see, there is a musty proverb that he who sups with that personage needs a long spoon. Well, I would not sup with him – if he exists. Our supper will be none too profuse as it is," and again he laughed.

So, indeed, it seemed, judging by what Pierre brought in later. The soup, served in a handsome silver tureen, whose antique form and chasings must have dated back to the days of Henri de Navarre at latest, was so thin that it was nothing but boiling water with a greasy flavour, and St. Georges twisted his long mustaches with dismay as he gazed into the stuff before him. Moreover, the bread with which he endeavoured to fortify this meagre commencement was half baked, so that it was of the consistency of dough. Next, the meat which was brought to table must have been unkilld at the time he rode into Dijon, so tough and tasteless was it; and the wine was a disgrace to France, let alone to Burgundy, where every peasant can obtain a drink that is palatable if weak. And, to add to the other miseries of this *régale*, the tablecloth and napkins were so damp that, affected by the tureen and plates, which were hot if they possessed no other virtues – such as eatable food upon them – they smoked so much that the guest could scarcely see his host across the table.

"Not the fare of Languedoc," this worthy divine muttered, once or twice, "not the fare of Languedoc. Ah, Monsieur St. Georges, you must come and see me in my bishopric if you want to live well. I can give you a good supper there."

"So I have heard, monseigneur. With many other things as well. Music, I hear, accompanies your feasts; the voices of silver-tongued lads –"

"Ha!" chuckled the other, "you have heard that. Well, why not? The choir is lazy, and – since it costs me nothing – may as well sing at my table. Now, since I cannot persuade you to eat more," St. Georges having pushed his plate away from him with an action of disgust, "let us have a little talk. – Pierre, go away; we wish to be alone. Though – stay – first of all bring a bottle of the old clos from the buffet – the old clos, you understand, the '79 bottling."

The cavalryman wondered if the "old clos" was likely to be any better than the vinaigrous stuff he had just been treated to, and sat waiting its arrival with curiosity, if not impatience. Meanwhile, he regarded his host from under his eyelids as well as he could through the mist made by the still steaming napkins, and also by the wet, hissing logs which spluttered and reeked in the grate close by which the table had been drawn up. The old man, he saw, was perfectly cognizant that he was being observed; occasionally from under *his* eyelids he would shoot a glance in his turn at the great form of the ²*cheval-léger* near him, and would then smile in what he evidently intended to be an engaging manner; while at other times he would swiftly remove his eyes and gaze meditatively into the green wood that smouldered on the andirons.

Then Pierre came back with a bottle that appeared, outwardly at least, to give promise of containing good liquor within it, since it was covered with dust and cobwebs, and, uncorking it and placing two long, thin, tapering glasses by its side, withdrew – yet not before Phélypeaux, with that remarkable persistency in mentioning his guest's name which the latter had previously remarked, had called out:

"Fill Monsieur St. Georges's glass, Pierre. Fill it, I say. Fill the glass of Monsieur St. Georges. – Monsieur St. Georges," raising his own, "I drink to you. To your good health and prosperous ride to Paris. And afterward, Monsieur St. Georges – afterward."

² Cheval-léger is a modern rendering of the old term.

CHAPTER III. IT IS THE MAN

The wine *was* good! Worthy of whatever *clos* it had ripened on! A glass of it went far to repay St. Georges for any discomfort he had suffered during the wretched meal just concluded, and made amends for all that had passed hitherto. As for the Bishop of Lodève, he drank two glasses rapidly in succession, smacked his lips, and peered at the ruby liquid held between the guttering candle and his eye in the most approved fashion, and seemed to be making or receiving amends for the miserable meal he had also partaken of, though so sparingly that the soldier thought he must either have made a better one recently or be about to make one later on.

Then, after he had put three of the logs together – which seemed at last as though about to burn with some effect – by the summary method of kicking them close to each other with his foot, he said quietly, though quite unexpectedly on the part of the other:

"His Most Christian Majesty – or rather Louvois for him – wrote me that I might expect a visit from you on your way from Franche-Comté to Paris."

"Indeed!" said St. Georges, looking, as he felt, astonished. After which he added: "Truly, for a poor lieutenant of horse, such as I am, the king seems much interested in my doings. I marvel much that he should be so."

"Family interest, perhaps?" said the bishop, glinting an eye at him from behind the glass which he was again holding up to the light of the guttering candle. "Family interest is useful at court."

"Family interest!" exclaimed the other, pushing his glass away from him. "Monseigneur, it is evident you know nothing of Georges St. Georges, or you would not mention that. Still, how should you know my affairs?"

"How, indeed!" replied Phélypeaux, though again there was a flash from the eye – "how, indeed! I – I never heard of you until his Majesty said you would honour me with a visit. Yet, Captain – I mean Monsieur – St. Georges, there must be something which guides Louis in sending for you – in removing you from the miserable garrison in the Jura to Paris. Ah, Paris!" he interjected with an upward glance. "Paris! Paris!" But having recovered from this fervent ecstasy, he continued: "And if not family interest – I am a believer in family interest myself – what can it be? Unless, of course, you have been selected because of your military promise."

"Nor can it be that either," replied the guest. "I have been in garrison at Pontarlier for a year, and as for my service, why I have done nothing to distinguish myself. No more than thousands of his Majesty's troops have done – nay, not half so much."

"How old are you, may I ask?"

"Thirty-three."

"Ah," replied monseigneur, "and this is the third day of '88. So you were born in 1655. Ah!" and he leaned back in his chair and muttered to himself, though once he said quite audibly: "Yes, yes. That would do very well."

"What would do very well, monseigneur?" asked the other, looking at him.

"Pardon me," replied the bishop, and St. Georges could not help remarking how much more courtly his manner had become by degrees, so that, while heretofore it was quite in keeping with what he had originally imagined him to be – a servitor – it was now thoroughly suitable to his position – the position of a member of an old French family and of a father of the Church; "pardon me, my mind rambles sometimes when – when I throw it back. I was reflecting that – that – it was in that year I was made bishop. So you were born in 1655? And how – since you say you have none of that valuable family interest – did you become a *cheval-léger*?"

"It is somewhat of a story, and a long one. Hark! surely that is the cathedral clock striking. It is too late to pester you with my affairs."

"Not a jot," exclaimed Phélypeaux – "not a jot. Nay, tell the story, and – shall we crack another bottle of the clos? It is good wine."

"It is, indeed," replied St. Georges, "excellent. Yet I will drink no more. Three glasses are all I allow myself after supper at the best of times. And, after all, my history will not take long in telling. At least such portions of it as I need tell you."

"Tell me all. I love to hear the history of the young and adventurous, as you are – as you must be. The *chevaux-légers* encounter adventure even in garrison," and he leered at him.

"I have encountered none, or very few. A few indecisive campaigns against Holland in the year the king gave me my commission – namely, fourteen years ago – then the Peace of Nimeguen, and since then stagnation in various garrisons. Yet they say the time is coming for war. Holland seeks allies everywhere against France; soon a great campaign should occur."

"Without doubt, when his Most Christian Majesty will triumph as he has done before. But why – how – did you obtain your commission? You do not tell me that."

"No, I had forgotten. Yet 'tis not much to tell. My mother – an English woman – excuse me, Monseigneur l'Évêque, but you have spilt your wine."

"So, indeed, I have," said the bishop, sopping up the wine which his elbow had overturned by a sudden jerk while the other was speaking, "so, indeed, I have. But 'tis not much. And there is still that other bottle uncorked." Then with a sidelong glance he said: "So your mother was an English woman. *Ah! mon Dieu, elles sont belles, ces Anglaises!* An English woman. Well, well!"

"Yes, an English woman. Daughter of a Protestant cavalier who left England when the Commonwealth was declared. He had done his best for the king, but with his death he could do no more. So he quitted his country forever."

"Most interesting," exclaimed the bishop, "but your father, Monsieur St. Georges. Who was he? Of the St. Georges's family, perhaps, of Auvergne! Or another branch, of Dauphiné! A noble family is that of St. Georges!"

"He was of the branch in Auvergne. A humble member, but still of it. I know no more."

"No more?"

"No."

"Humph! Strange! Pardon me, monsieur, I would not ask a delicate question – but – but – did not the family recognise the marriage of Monsieur St. Georges?"

"They did not recognise it for the simple reason that they were never told of it. It did not please my father to divulge the marriage to his family, so they were left in ignorance that it had ever taken place."

"And was Monsieur St. Georges – your father – a soldier like yourself?"

"He was a soldier like myself. And served against Condé."

"Against Condé. Under Turenne, doubtless?" and once more he cast a sidelong glance at his visitor.

"Yes. Under Turenne. They were, I have heard, more than commander and subordinate. They were friends."

"A great friendship!" exclaimed the bishop. "A great friendship! To his influence you doubtless owe your commission, obtained, I think you said, in '74, the year before Turenne's death."

"Doubtless. So my father said. He died in the same year as the marshal."

"In battle, too, no doubt?" Then, seeing a look upon the other's face which seemed to express a desire for no more questioning – though, indeed, he bowed gravely at the question if his father had died in battle – monseigneur with a polite bow said he would ask him no more impertinent questions, and turned the conversation by exclaiming:

"But you must be weary, monsieur. You would rest, I am sure. I will call Pierre to show you to your room. Your child will sleep better at the 'Ours' than you will do here, since my accommodation

is not of the first order, owing to my being able to inhabit the house so little. But we have done our best. We have done our best."

"I thank you," the soldier said, rising from his chair. "Now, monseigneur, let me pay my farewells to you at the same time I say 'Good-night.' I propose to ride to-morrow at daybreak, and if possible to reach Bar by night. Though much I doubt doing so; my horse is jaded already, and can scarce compass a league an hour. And 'tis more than twenty leagues from here, I take it."

"Ay, 'tis. More like twenty-five. And you have, you know, a burden. You carry weight. There is the little child."

"Yes, there is the child."

"You guard it carefully, Monsieur St. Georges. By the way, you have not told me. Where is its mother, your wife?"

Again the soldier answered as he had before answered to the watchman's wife – yet, he knew not why, he felt more repugnance in speaking of his dead wife to this strange bishop than he had when addressing either that simple woman or the landlady of the "Ours." But it had to be done – he could not make a secret of what was, in fact, no secret. So he answered, speaking rapidly, as though desirous of getting his answer over:

"She is dead. Our existence together was short. We loved each other dearly, but it pleased God to take her from me. She died a year after our marriage, in giving birth to the babe."

Phélypeaux bowed his head gravely, as though, perhaps, intending thereby to express sympathy with the other, and said, "It was sad, very sad." Then he continued:

"And madame —*pauvre dame!*— was she, too, English, or of some French family?"

"She was, monseigneur, a simple French girl. Of no family – such as you, monseigneur, would know of. A girl of the people, of the *bourgeoisie*. Yet I loved her; she became my wife, and now – now" – and he looked meditatively down into the ashes of the (by this time) charred and burnt-out logs – "I have no wife. That is all. Monseigneur, permit me to wish you good-night."

The bishop rang the bell, and while they waited for Pierre to come, he said:

"You asked me, Monsieur St. Georges, this evening, why his Most Christian Majesty should have thought fit through Louvois to direct you to stay at my house in Dijon? I shall not see you to-morrow ere you depart; let me therefore be frank. The king – and Louvois also – are in correspondence with me on a political matter, which must not even be trusted to the post, nor to courier, nor messenger. Nay, we do not even write what we have to say, but, instead, correspond by words and signs. Now, you are a trusty man – you will go far – already I see your captaincy of a troop looming up before you. Therefore I will send by you one word and one alone. You cannot forget it, for it is perhaps the simplest in our or any language. You will convey it?"

"I am the king's servant. What is the word, monseigneur?"

"The word 'Yes.'"

"The word 'Yes,'" the *cheveu-léger* repeated. "The word 'Yes.' That is it? No more?"

"Nothing more. Simply the word 'Yes.' Yet stay, remember my instructions. The word is sent as much to Louvois as to the king. It is a common message to both. And there is one other thing. The Marquise de Roquemaure is also concerned in this matter; she will without doubt ask you what the word is I have sent. And, monsieur, there is no need of secrecy with her. You may frankly tell her."

Again with military precision the other made sure of his instructions.

"I may say that the word you send is 'Yes'?"

"Precisely."

"I shall remember."

And now, Pierre coming in, the bishop bade him farewell and good-night.

"The bed, I trust," he said, addressing the servant, "is as comfortable as may be under the circumstances. Also properly aired. For Monsieur St. Georges must sleep well to-night. He rides to Troyes to-morrow or as far upon his road as he can get. He must sleep well."

"So! he rides to Troyes to-morrow," repeated the domestic, surlily – "to Troyes, eh? And at what hour does Monsieur St. Georges set forth? I must know, so that he shall be called."

"At daybreak," St. Georges replied.

The man led him after this up some great stairs, evidently the principal ones of the mansion, and past what were the chief salons, holding the lantern he carried above his head all the way and casting thereby weird shadows on to walls and corners. Then up another flight they went – their feet echoing now on the bare, uncarpeted stairs, and so along a corridor until at the end the man opened a door and ushered the guest into a moderately sized room very sparsely furnished in all except the bed, which was large enough for three men to have slept in side by side. Next, lighting a taper which looked as though it might burn ten minutes but not longer, he gruffly bade St. Georges "Good-night," and, saying that he should be called before daybreak, he strode away, while the other heard his heavy footfall gradually grow fainter and fainter until, at last, there was no further sound in the house except the banging of a door now and again.

"*Nom d'un chien!*" exclaimed the soldier, as he unbuckled his spurs, drew off his long riding boots, and, unsheathing his sword, laid it along the side of the bed nearest the wall, "this is a pleasant hole for a man to find himself in." And throwing himself on the bed, and discovering that, as he drew the counterpane up about his shoulders, it was so short that it did not reach below his knees, he wrapped up the lower part of his body in the great cloak in which he had carried the child all day, and so, shivering with cold, went at last to sleep.

Down below, while this had been going on, Pierre had rejoined his master, and, standing before him, was answering several questions put with great rapidity.

"Your horse is sound?" the bishop asked, as now he partook of a glass out of the second bottle.

"Ay, it is sound," replied the other. "It has not left the stable for three days."

"You can, therefore, ride forth to-morrow."

"Further than he can, weather permitting."

"Good. Therefore ride ahead of him until you meet the Marquis de Roquemaure. Then you can deliver to him a message somewhat similar to the one he will deliver to the mother of the noble marquis."

"What is the message?"

"The message he will deliver to madame la marquise – if he is fortunate enough to see her – is the word 'Yes.' The message you will deliver to her son, whom you *must* see, is also 'Yes.' And, if you can remember, you may also say to the marquis, 'It is the man.' *Can* you remember?"

"Without doubt I can. The words are: 'Yes. It is the man.'"

"Those are the words."

CHAPTER IV. "HER LIFE STANDS IN THE PATH OF OTHERS' GREED."

Awakened in the dark of the morning by a loud knocking on the door, St. Georges sprang off the bed and called lustily to know who was there?

"It is near dawn," a female voice answered. "Monsieur was to be awakened."

"Where is the man called Pierre?" asked St. Georges, perceiving that the tones were not his gruff ones.

"He has gone forth to one of the bishop's farms at Pouilly. He bade me call monsieur."

"And the bishop?"

"Monseigneur is not yet risen. There is a meal prepared for monsieur below, if he will partake of it."

Monsieur so far partook of it on descending – after he had made a rapid toilet, cleaned his sword by passing the folds of his cloak over it, and (good soldier as he was!) having said a prayer at his bedside ere leaving the room – as to drink a cup of thick, lukewarm chocolate. But beyond this he would wait no longer, being very anxious to regain the custody of his child. Also he thought that the "Ours" would offer a more satisfying meal than that now set before him, which, in truth, was nothing but the selfsame chocolate, some bread, and a half-finished *saucisson* which did not look particularly appetizing.

Therefore he tossed on the table a silver crown to the miserable-looking old woman who had called him, and who afterward escorted him downstairs, and, following her across the more than ever snow-covered courtyard, emerged on to the great *place*.

And still, as he observed, the snow fell, must have been falling all night, since it lay upon this open space in great tussocks, or mounds, while across the *place* itself no footmark was to be seen. It was, indeed, as though a vast white sea stretched from the house of Phélypeaux over to where the "Ours" stood.

Beneath a dull leaden canopy of cloud the wintry day was, however, coming; from the chimneys of the inn he could see the smoke, scarcely more dull and leaden than that canopy itself, rising; at the door of the inn he saw the mousquetaire standing, looking up at what should have been the heavens.

"Is all well?" he asked as he drew close to him now. "Have you seen the child?"

"All well, monsieur," the other replied, saluting as he spoke – "all well, both with child and horse. Yet, *ma foi!* what a day for a journey! Must monsieur, indeed, continue his?"

"Ay!" replied St. Georges, "I must. My orders are to pause no longer than necessary on the route to Paris, to report myself to the Minister of War, the Marquis de Louvois." Then turning to the mousquetaire, he asked: "What are your orders? Do you ride toward Bar to-day?"

"Since monsieur proceeds, so do I. Yet I doubt if we get even so far as Bar. *Ciel!* will the snow ever cease to fall?"

But in spite of the snow, in half an hour both were ready to set out. The little child, Dorine, had slept well, the *patronne* said, had lain snug and close with two of her own all through the night, while she had seen to its nourishment and had herself washed and fed it.

"Heaven bless you, for a true woman," St. Georges said, "Heaven bless you!"

But the woman would hear of no thanks; she reiterated again and again that she was a mother herself and had a mother's heart within her; she only wished monsieur would leave the little thing with her until he came back; she would warrant it should be well cared for until he did.

"I doubt my ever coming back this way," he said, as he ate his breakfast – a substantial one, far different from that which the bishop's servant had been able to set before him – and she ministered to his wants, "unless the future war rolls toward Burgundy. I am *en route* for Paris, and Heaven only knows where to afterward."

"Find a good home for her, monsieur," she said, "a home where she may at least be safe while you are away campaigning. Nay," she continued, "if I might make so bold, meaning no offence, find a new mother for her. It would be a sad life for her even though monsieur followed a stay-at-home existence; 'twill be doubly hard when you are separated from her."

But St. Georges only shook his head and said mournfully there was no other wife for him; a statement from which she dissented vehemently. Then she asked:

"Does monsieur know of any one in Paris to whom the little Dorine might be confided? If not," she continued – "she intended no liberty! – she could recommend one with whom it would always be safe. A woman of Dijon like herself, married and settled in Paris; married, indeed, to a cousin of her late husband, who, rest his soul! had been dead eighteen months. This woman's husband was a mercer in a large way of business in the Rue de Timoleon, lived well, and had children of his own; it would be an *abri* for the child if monsieur cared to consider it."

"Care to consider it!" exclaimed St. Georges, "why, it is the very thing I should wish." Then he paused a moment, reflecting deeply and looking round the kitchen, as though to see that they were alone, which they were with the exception of the mousquetaire, who sat by the great fire warming himself.

"Hark you, dame," he said, lowering his voice a little, though not from any fear of the mousquetaire hearing, but more from instinct than anything else. "You have done me one great kindness in being so tender to my poor little motherless babe. Will you answer me, therefore, a question? Will – will – suppose, I would say, that I wished the whereabouts of this, my child, unknown to any one – would she be safe in the house of this mercer you speak of? Also – if you – should be asked by any one – high or low, here in Dijon – if, *par hasard*, you know, or could guess, had indeed the faintest suspicion, where that little child might be – would you hold your peace? Would you let this be a secret locked only in your own honest heart?"

"Would I? Ay, monsieur, I would! Your child has slept with my little *fillettes*; when I went to arouse them ere dawn they all lay cheek to cheek, and with their arms entwined. She is as one of mine, therefore; she shall be as sacred. *Je le jure*."

"Give me your friend's name and address," St. Georges made answer. "What you have said is enough. I trust you as I should have trusted her dead mother." And he took his tablets from his pouch as he spoke.

"Write," said the woman, "the name of Le Sieur Blecy, 5 Rue de Timoleon. That is sufficient. His wife Susanne will arrange with you for the safety of the little one when she knows that I have sent you."

"But," exclaimed St. Georges, "can you give me no line, no word, to her or him? Surely she will not accept me on my own assurances. Besides, 'tis much to ask. She will scarcely receive my child into her house, into her family, without some proofs from you."

"How," exclaimed the woman, "can I send such proof? I can not write – alas! I can not even read." She blushed as she spoke – though truly she need not have done so, since in all Burgundy, in the days of Louis *le Dieudonné*, not one in a hundred could do more than she – and he himself reddened at having so put her to shame, and muttered some sort of excuse under his thick mustache.

"Send some trifle that she will recognise – some little thing she will know to have been yours," exclaimed the mousquetaire from his seat in the chimney-piece. "She will know that."

"Ha!" she said, recovering instantly from her confusion, "and so I will." Then, casting her eyes round the great stone-floor kitchen and seeing nothing therein that she could send to her friend, she ran up the stairs and came back bearing in her hand a little missal, with her name written in it.

"It was given to me by Susanne's mother on my wedding day, she saying that, though I could not follow the service with it, my children might learn to do so – as they shall! – as they shall!"

St. Georges took the book – a tiny one – and put it in his pouch also, along with his tablets; then he said to the mousquetaire: "Friend, if you have still a mind to depart, let us set out. Yet I would not take you from your comfortable nook if duty does not make it absolutely necessary for you to go."

"I will go," the other said, springing to his feet. "All is ready; my horse has rested for two days; at least we can get some distance on our route. Come, monsieur, let us away."

Therefore St. Georges paid the reckoning due, not forgetting among other things to give the woman's children – who were now all up and ready for their breakfast – some little sums to buy things with; and so he bade the woman farewell, thanking her again and again for her goodness, and promising that he should certainly seek the Sieur de Blecy on his arrival in Paris.

"Also," he said, as he shook her by the hand, "I shall find some means of letting you know of her welfare. Burgundy is far from Paris, yet there is always continuous passing to and fro from one to the other – you shall hear from me."

"I hope so," she said, "and, *tenez!* De Blecy is himself of Burgundy; his old mother lives near here – not a league away – send through him. He corresponds often with her and others. A word to me will reach. Farewell, monsieur; – farewell, mousquetaire. Adieu!"

Yet the last word was not said; for while the soldier went into the inn yard to fetch the horses and St. Georges brought down from the room she slept in his little child – who prattled in her baby way to him while her soft blue eyes smiled up in his – and wrapped it in his great cloak preparatory to mounting the block before the inn door, she asked:

"Why, why, monsieur, do you desire that no one should know where she is? Why keep her existence a secret? Surely there are none who would harm so innocent a little thing as that?"

He paused a moment, looking down at her from his great height as though meditating deeply; then he said:

"I will trust you fully. I wish her whereabouts – not her existence, that is already known – kept secret until the time comes that either she shall be in safety out of France or I can be ever near to guard and watch over her; for her life – after mine – stands in the path of others' greed – perhaps of others' ambition. My life first, then hers. I know it, have known it long; until a day or so ago I thought none other knew it –"

"And?" she asked, glancing up at him, while she stole her hand into the folds of his cloak and again softly patted the child's little dimpled cheek – "and – ?"

"And," he continued, "I am sure now that against her life, or at least her liberty, some attempt will be made – as it will against mine. That," he said, sinking his voice to a whisper, "is why I am recalled to Paris. Farewell!"

CHAPTER V. THE GRAVEYARD

By the time that the wintry night was about once more to close in upon them they were nearing Aignay-le-Duc, having passed through the village of Baigneux some two or three hours previously.

A change in the weather had set in; the snow had ceased to fall at last; right in their faces from the north-northwest there blew a cold, frosty wind; from beneath their horses' hoofs there came a crisp sound, which told as plainly as words that the soft, feathery snow was hardening, while the ease with which the animals now lifted their feet showed that the travelling was becoming easier to them every moment.

"Courage! courage!" exclaimed St. Georges; "if we proceed thus we may reach Chatillon-sur-Seine to-night. What think you, Boussac?"

On their road the men, as was natural between two comrades of the sword, had become intimate, St. Georges telling the mousquetaire some of that history of his life which will be unfolded as these pages proceed, while the other had in a few words given him his own. His name was Boussac – Armand Boussac – the latter drawn from a little village or town in Lower Berri, wherein his father was a *petit seigneur*.

"A poor place, monsieur," he said, "a rock – fortified, however, strongly – and with a castle almost inaccessible except to the crows and hawks. A place in which a man who would see the world can yet scarce find the way to study his fellow-creatures. *Ma foi*, there are not many there! A priest or two – those always! – some farmers whose fields lie at the foot of the rock, some old crones who, no longer able to earn anything in those fields, are kept until they die by those who can. And on the rock a few soldiers drawn from the regiment of Berri – men who eat their hearts out in despair when sent to garrison it."

"A cheerful spot, in truth!" said St. Georges, with a smile; "no wonder you left the rock and sought the mousquetaires. And I see by your horse that you are of the black regiment.³ How did you find your way to it?"

"Easily. I descended once to Clermont, having bade farewell to my father and intending to join the Regiment de Berri, when, lo! as I entered the town, I saw our *grand seigneur* of Creuse in talk with an officer of the Mousquetaires Noirs. Then as I saluted him he called out to me: 'Boussac! Boussac! what have you crossed the mountains for and come to Clermont?' '*Pardie!*' I replied, 'monsieur, to seek my fortune as a soldier. I hear there are some of the Regiment of Berri here. And the *arrière-ban* is out, the summons made.' 'And so it is,' replied the seigneur, 'only the Regiment of Berri is complete, has all its complement. Now, here is the colonel of the mousquetaires; if he would take you, why, your fortune's made. Ask him, Boussac. Ask him.' So, monsieur, I asked him, telling him I could ride any horse; would do so if he brought one; knew the *escrime—ma foi!* many a time had I fenced in the old castle with those of the regiment; was strong and healthy, and, *voilà!* it was done. Even the Mousquetaires – the king's own guard, the men of the *Maison du Roi* were recruiting – it needed only that one should be of gentle blood, as the Boussacs are. So, monsieur, I am mousquetaire; have fought when they fight; we, of Ours, were at Mulhausen, Turckheim, and Salzbach –"

"Did you see Turenne killed?" asked St. Georges, turning on his horse to look at his comrade.

"Nay, not killed, but just before the battle. Ah! he was a soldier!" Then he went on with his recollections, finishing up by saying: "But, alas! since then the peace has come, and we have naught to do but to dance about the galleries of Versailles and be in attendance on the king and his court. That," he said, patting his horse's coal-black neck, "is no work for a soldier."

³ "Les mousquetaires tiraient leur noms de la couleur de leur chevaux." —*St. Simon*.

"It will change ere long," said St. Georges, "if all accounts be true. Louis is threatened from all sides by the Dutchman, William, above all. It will come."

"Let us hope so, monsieur. Peace is no good to us."

"No! peace is no good to us. My only hope is, England may not be drawn into the game."

"And wherefore, monsieur?"

"I am half English – my mother was of that country. To draw a sword against the land that gave her birth would be no pleasure to me."

"Yet, on the other – and the greater – side, monsieur is French. How should you decide, therefore, if war comes?"

St. Georges rode on silently for a little while ere he answered this question, and the mousquetaire could see that he was pondering deeply. Then he seemed to shake himself clear of his doubts, and said:

"My allegiance is to France. I have sworn fidelity to the king. To him consequently I belong. If, therefore," he continued, "my fidelity to him brings no harm to one whom I love best of all in the world" – and Boussac saw his arm enfold more closely the little child he carried – "I draw my sword for him."

"Can your fidelity do that – bring harm to her?" he asked.

"It might," replied the other, "it might. In serving Louis, in serving France, it may be that I put her in deadly peril. But as yet, Boussac, I can tell you no more."

That Boussac was bewildered by this enigmatical remark he could plainly see. The soldier had wrinkled his brow and stared at him as he made it. Now he rode quietly by his side, saying no further word, yet evidently turning it over in his own mind. And so, as they progressed, the night came nearly upon them, and had the weather not now changed altogether and become fine and clear, there would have been no daylight left.

Suddenly, however, as they rode thus silently but at a good pace – for the frosted snow on the path or road shone out clear and distinct now to their and their horses' eyes in spite of the oncoming night – St. Georges became sure of what at first he had only imagined – namely, that Boussac suspected something, was watching for something – perhaps an ambush or an attack.

"What is it?" he asked in a low voice, as the mousquetaire tightened his hand upon the rein of his horse and, bending forward over its jet-black mane, peered into the bushes of the side on which he rode; and also he noticed that his comrade put his hand to his long sword and, drawing it an inch or two from its scabbard once or twice, loosened it. "What is it, Boussac?" But as he spoke he, too, made his weapon ready in the same way.

"Take no notice," muttered the mousquetaire, "ride straight ahead, look neither to left nor right. Yet – listen. All day from the time we were a league outside of Dijon —*ma foi!*" in a loud tone that might have been heard fifty yards off, "a fine night, a pleasant night for the season!" – then lowering it again, "a man has tracked us, a man armed and masked, or masked whenever we drew near him —*si, si, monsieur*"; again in the loud voice assumed for the purpose, "the *vin du pays*, especially of Chantillon, is excellent; a cup will cheer us to-night."

"Doubtless," replied St. Georges, in a similar voice; then sinking it, he asked beneath his teeth, "Why not warn me before?"

"Oh! red wine, monsieur, above all," replied Boussac, loudly. "There is little white grows here." Again lowering his tone: "I feared to distress, to alarm you. You had the child. Now I am forced to do so. He has been joined by five others at different points since we passed Flavigny. All armed and all masked. Yes," in the loud voice, "and with a *soupe à l'oignon*, as monsieur says. They are around us," sinking it again. "I judge they mean attack. Well, we know *we are* soldiers: they should be brigands, *larrons!* Shall we encounter them, give them a chance to show who, and what they are?"

"Ay," said St. Georges. "Observe, here is a small church and graveyard; wheel in and let us await them. I see them now, even in the dusk."

Swiftly, as on parade, the order was given, and as swiftly executed. The black horse wheeled by the side of the chestnut of the *cheval-léger* into the open graveyard – the gate of the place hung on one hinge down toward the road from which the church rose somewhat – and then St. Georges in a loud voice said:

"Halt here, comrade. Our horses are a little blown. We will breathe them somewhat."

It was a wretched, uncared-for spot into which they had ridden, the church being a little, low-built edifice of evidently great antiquity, and doubtless utilized for service by the out-dwellers of Aignay-le-Duc, which lay half a league further off, and some sparse lights of which might be now seen twinkling in the clear, frosty air beneath a young moon that rose to the right of the village. In the graveyard itself there was the usual heterogeneous accumulation of tombstones and memorials of the dead; here and there some dark-slate headstones; in other places wooden crosses with imitation flowers hanging on their crossbars, covered with frozen snow; in others, huge mounds alone, to mark the spots where the dead lay.

"Not bad," said the mousquetaire, as he glanced his eye round the melancholy spot, "for an encounter, if they mean one. – Steady, *mon brave*," to his horse, "steady! – Ah! here comes one. Well, we have the point o' vantage. We are in the churchyard; they have to come up the rise to attack us. *Peste!* what can they want with two soldiers?"

St. Georges arranged his child under his arm more carefully, gathered his reins into the hand of that arm, and then, with the other, drew his long sword – it glittered in the rays of the young moon like a streak of phosphorus! – and was followed in this action by Boussac. After which he whispered: "See! All six are coming. Which is the one who, you say, followed us from Flavigny?"

"He who hangs behind all the others. The biggest of all."

As the mousquetaire answered, the men of whom he had spoken, and who had gradually come from behind the hedges and trees that grew all along the way, formed up together, five of them being in a body behind one who was evidently their leader and who rode a little ahead. And all were, as Boussac had said, masked, while one or two had breastpieces over their jerkins and some large gorgets. As for the leader himself, he wore what, even for the end of the seventeenth century, was almost now obsolete, a burganet with the visor down.

As he advanced until his horse's head was where the graveyard gate would have been, had it hung properly on its hinges and been closed, he spoke, saying – while his voice sounded hollow by reason of the band of steel which muffled it: "Who are you who ride on the king's highroad to-night? Soldiers, I see, by your accoutrements, and one a mousquetaire. Answer and explain why neither are with your regiments."

"First," replied St. Georges, "answer you, yourself. By what right do you demand so much of a *cheval-léger*, whose cockade is his passport, and of a mousquetaire who is of the king's own house?"

"I represent the governor of the territory of Burgundy, and have the right to make the demand."

"That we will concede when you give us proof of it. Meanwhile, take my assurance as an officer that we ride by the king's orders. That order I carry in my pocket for myself; my comrade goes to join the Mousquetaires Noirs at Bar."

"Still we must see your papers."

"As you shall," said St. Georges, "when you produce your own. Otherwise we intend to proceed to-night to that village ahead."

"You do? How if we prevent you?"

"Prevent!" echoed St. Georges, with a contemptuous laugh. "Prevent! Come, sir, come. You are no representative of the governor, as you know very well. He scarcely, I imagine, sets spies, such as that skulking fellow behind you, to track the king's soldiers from village to village, from daybreak to night." Then raising his voice authoritatively, he said: "Stand out of our way! – Boussac, *avancéz!*" and he urged his horse forward to the leader so that the animals' heads touched.

"So be it," exclaimed the other, and, turning his head to those behind, the two comrades heard him say: "The bait takes. Fall on."

In an instant the *mêlée* had begun – in another St. Georges knew what he had from the first suspected. It was his life and the life of his child that was aimed at!

All hurled their horses against him – except the sixth man, he who had tracked them all day, and who now, masked and with his sword drawn, sat his horse outside of the fray, looking on at what was being done by the others.

The leader dealt blow after blow at St. Georges without effect, owing to the latter's skilful swordsmanship; the remaining four directed theirs at the arm which bore and shielded the child, and which, had Armand Boussac not been by, would have been pierced through and through. But the adroit swordsman perceived the intention of these murderers – the would-be murderers of a little child! – and foiled them again and again, beating off their weapons with his own, and at the same time losing no opportunity of attacking them. And so far was he successful that already he had put two *hors de combat*. One was by now off his horse, lying across a snow-covered grave which was rapidly becoming red from the blood that poured from his lungs, through which the mousquetaire's sword had passed two minutes before; the other, lying forward on his horse's neck, was urging the animal out of the press of the fight.

And now the odds were but three to two – for still the man who took no part in the attack sat on his animal's back, and, indeed, from the glances he cast round him appeared to be meditating flight.

Yet withal they were unequal odds, especially since their three antagonists were skilful swordsmen, the leader in particular wielding his weapon with remarkable craft. Moreover, by his possession of the burganet he wore, the odds were still greater in his favour – it had saved his life more than once already, from the blows dealt at his head by St. Georges.

Yet now those odds were soon further diminished – the chances became at last equal. As one of the two followers thrust at the arm of the *cheveau-léger*, meaning to strike the burden he carried beneath, Boussac with a quick parry turned his weapon off, and thus gliding it along his own blade, brought its hilt with a clash against his own. Then in a moment the mousquetaire had seized the sword arm of his antagonist, and, holding it a moment, struck through the man's body with his own weapon, which he shortened in his grasp. A second later the fellow was writhing on the ground beneath the feet of the various steeds, and helping to crimson the snow, as the others had done who had fallen previously.

"*Pasquedieu!*" the comrades heard the leader mutter through the bars of his helmet, "we fail." Then, as he and St. Georges wheeled around on their horses, while still their weapons clashed and writhed together, he shouted to the man who had taken no part in the affray, "Hound! cur! come and render assistance!"

"Ay," exclaimed Boussac, "come and render him assistance. The chances are even without you. We shall defeat him ere long if you assist not!" and with a mocking laugh he again attacked his own particular adversary, taking heed at the same time to insure that no thrust nor blow of his should strike the precious burden under St. Georges's arm.

In truth, the fellow skulking on the horse seemed to think that matters tended in the direction indicated, for, instead of responding to the leader's orders, he shook up the reins of his own horse, and in a moment had vanished into the night, leaving the four combatants equally matched – except that on the side of St. Georges and Boussac there was the child to be protected.

And now those four set grimly to work – though had there been an onlooker of the fray in that deserted churchyard he would have said that the defenders, and not the attackers, had most stomach for the fight! St. Georges, his blood at boiling point at the assaults made on his little child – now screaming lustily at the noise and clash of steel, and perhaps at the unwonted tossing about to which it had been subjected – fought determinately, his teeth clinched, his eyes gleaming fire. He had sworn to kill this assassin, who had led his band against him. He meant to kill him!

Yet it was hard to do – the other was himself a swordsman of skill. But, skilful as he was, one good thing had now happened: neither he nor his follower could any more threaten harm to the little Dorine! They had sufficient to do to protect themselves from the two soldiers – to protect themselves from the blows and thrusts that came at them; so that, at last, they were forced to retreat down the slope to the road – driven back by the irresistible fury of St. Georges and his follower. And, eventually, seeing that he had got the worst of it, the leader, after one ineffectual thrust at his antagonist, wheeled his horse round and, with a cry to the other to follow him, dashed off down the road in the same direction that the man who had skulked all through the fight had taken.

Yet such an order was more easily given than obeyed, since, at the moment he uttered it, Boussac had by a clever parry sent the other's sword flying out of his hand, while, an instant afterward, he dealt him such a buffet with his own gantleted hand as knocked him off his horse on to the top of those lying on the ground beneath.

CHAPTER VI. A LITTLE LIGHT

The first thought of both the victors was to see to the child, who, while still screaming piteously, was unharmed – though a deep cut in St. Georges's sleeve and, as he afterward found, a slight sword thrust in the forearm, showed how great had been her peril and how near her little body to being pierced by one of the ruffians' swords. Still she was safe, untouched, and her father muttered a hasty thanksgiving to God as he found such was the case.

Then they addressed themselves to Boussac's vanquished antagonist – the last living and remaining remnant of their foes. For of those who had been overcome earlier in the fray, all three were dead, lying stark and stiff on the frozen ground across the graves where they had fallen. As for him, the living one, he presented as ghastly a spectacle as they who were gone to their doom – sitting up as he now did, and endeavouring to stanch the blood that flowed from his lips and nose in consequence of the blow dealt him by Boussac.

"Stand up," said St. Georges, as he towered over him, his drawn sword in his hand, while by the light of the moon, such as it was, he was able to see the fellow's face. "Stand up and answer my questions."

"What are you going to do to me?" asked the man, staggering to his feet at the other's command.

"Hang you to the nearest tree," replied St. Georges, "in all likelihood. Especially if you trifle with me. I will have the truth from you somehow. Now, *spadassin*, the meaning of this attack. Quick!"

"Monsieur, I know no more than you – monsieur, I – "

"No lies. Answer!" and he lifted his arm and drew his sword back as though about to plunge it into the other's throat. "Answer, I say! Who are you all, you and this carrion here?" and he spurned the dead with his foot. "Above all, who is the fellow in the antique morion, the man who takes double precautions to guard his head and, *ma foi!* to hide his features!"

"Again, I say monsieur, I know not. Nay, nay," he cried, seeing once more the threatening aspect of the other, and again the sword drawn back. "Nay, I swear it is the truth. Let me tell my tale."

"Tell it and be brief."

"Monsieur," the man, therefore, began, as St. Georges stood in front of him and Boussac never took his eyes off his face, while at the same time he held the horses' reins, "there came into our village – not this which you see down there, but Reccy, two leagues off – yesterday the man you call the leader, he who wears the burganet. And accompanied by one other – this," and he looked down at the dead men lying across the graves and touched one with his toe, thereby to indicate him. "Then," the fellow went on, "when he had drunk a cup and made a meal he spake to us sitting round the fire; to him, Gaspard," pointing to a dead man, "and to him, Arnaud," pointing to another, "and said that he and his follower were in search of a brigand riding to Paris from the Côte d'Or who had stolen a child from its lawful parents – a child, he said, whom the brigand desired to make away with, since it stood between him and great wealth."

"He said that?"

"Ay, monsieur, and more. That he must save the child at all costs, wrench it away from the man who had it."

"Now," exclaimed St. Georges passionately, "I know you lie! Neither he nor you endeavoured to save it, to wrench it away from me. On the contrary, all aimed at that harmless child's life, endeavoured to stab it through my cloak, under my arm. Villain! you shall die," and this time he made as though he would indeed slay the fellow.

"No! no! monsieur!" the man howled, overcome with fear of instant death – death that seemed so near now – "hear my story out; you will see I do not lie. It was not until later – when he had bought us – that we knew what he truly wanted. Let me proceed, monsieur."

"Go on!" said St. Georges, again dropping the point of his weapon.

"Also, he said," the man continued, "that he needed more men to make certain of catching him and hauling him to justice and releasing the child. Those were his very words. And he asked us, Gaspard, Arnaud, and myself, if we would take service with him. We looked strong and lusty, he thought – soldiers, perhaps. If we would take part in the undertaking there were fifty gold pistoles for us to divide. Was it worth our while? We said, Yes, it was worth our while; we were disbanded soldiers of the Verdelin Regiment – our time expired, and we looking for a fresh recruiting. If what he said was true – that we were wanted to arrest a kidnapper – we would join. But for no other purpose. Then he swore at us, told us we were *canaille*, that he explained not his movements nor made any oath to the truth of his statements; there was a bag of pistoles, and if we had horses and weapons – but not without – he would employ us. So we took service. Arnaud had two horses at his mother's farm; he lent one to Gaspard, I borrowed mine for two *écus*. *Voilà tout*."

"Is that all?" asked St. Georges quietly.

"All of importance. The pact was made, and then he said we must, this morning, move on toward Aignay-le-Duc. Le Brigand – as he called monsieur – would pass that way to-night, he thought. But, later on, he would know. A messenger from Dijon would arrive to tell him."

"A messenger from Dijon!" Both St. Georges and Boussac started at this and looked at each other in the uncertain light. A messenger from Dijon! Who could it be? Who was there who knew of St. Georges's whereabouts? Yet, as the man spoke, they guessed that the fellow whom Boussac had noticed, who had tracked them all day, mostly masked, must have been that messenger.

"He came at last," the narrator continued, "an hour or so before monsieur and his companion. And he told us that there were two, so that we had to do more than we had undertaken. Yet, we thought not much of that. We were five to two, for he, the messenger, averred he would take no part in the fight unless absolutely necessary. He was not well, he said; he had ridden all day – fighting was not his business; he was a messenger, not a soldier. So our employer cursed him for a poltroon, but told him he might stand out of the attack. We were five without him – that was enough."

"Go on," said St. Georges once more, seeing that again the man paused as though his narrative had concluded. "Go on. There is more to be told."

"But little, monsieur. Only this. As you wheeled into this graveyard he gave us one final order. 'They will resist,' he said, 'therefore spare not. Dead or alive they must be taken. Child and man. Dead or alive. You understand!'"

"And it was for that reason that all endeavoured to plunge their swords into this innocent child! My God!" And St. Georges paused a moment ere he went on; then he said to Boussac: "What shall we do to him? He merits death."

"*Ma foi!* he does," replied the mousquetaire, while he grimly added, "For my part, I am willing to execute it on him now."

At this sinister remark, uttered with the callousness which a brave soldier would naturally feel for the existence of such a creature, the other flung himself on his feet before them and began to howl so for mercy that St. Georges, more for fear that he would call the attention of some who might be about the village than aught else, bade him cease the noise he was making or he would indeed take effectual steps to stop it. Then, when this remark had produced the desired effect, namely, a cessation of the man's shouts, though he whimpered and whined like a beaten hound, the other continued:

"In spite of your villainy, of your assaults on one so harmless as the child I carry, you are too vile for us to stain our weapons with your blood. Yet, what to do with you?"

"Throw him in there," said Boussac with *sang froid*. "That will keep him quiet for some time at least," and he pointed to an open grave which yawned very near where they stood, and into whose black mouth he had been peering for some time. He added also: "It will be his only chance of ever occupying one. Such as he end by hanging on roadside gibbets or rotting on the wheel they have been broken upon – the peaceful grave is not for them."

St. Georges turned his eyes to the spot indicated, exclaiming that it would do very well. It was no newly made grave, he saw, prepared for one who had recently departed, but, instead, an old one that had been opened, perhaps to receive some fresh body; for by the side of it there lay a slab that had, it was plain to see, been pushed aside from where it had previously rested, as though to permit of it being so opened.

"Ay," echoed Boussac, sardonically, "it will do very well. Add when he is in – as we will soon have him – the stone shall be pushed back to keep him safe. Then he may holla loud enough and long: no one will hear him."

His hollas began again at once, however, for at the terrifying prospect of being thus incarcerated in so awful a manner he flung himself once more on his knees, and bellowed out:

"Nay! Nay! In pity, I beseech you. You know not what you do – what terrors you condemn me to. A plague, a horrible one, a sweating sickness, passed over this province a year back – it took many, among others him who laid here. He was of Chantillon – a seigneur – and is now removed by his friends. Mercy! Mercy! Mercy! Condemn me not to this. Think, I beseech you. The grave is infected, impregnated with contagion. Mercy! Mercy! Mercy!"

The fellow had thrust at his child's life – St. Georges remembered it even as he spoke! – yet, being a brave soldier himself, he could not condemn the ruffian to such horrors as these. Revenge he would have taken earlier, in the heat of the fight; would have killed the man with his own hand, even as he would have killed that other, the leader, had the chance arisen; but – this was beneath him. Therefore, he said:

"Bind him, Boussac, to this old yew. Bind him with his horse's reins and gag him. Then he must take his chance – the night grows late. We must away."

It was done almost as soon as ordered, the mousquetaire detaching the coarse reins of the man's horse – which was itself wounded and seemed incapable of action – and lashing him to the tree, while he took one of his stirrup leathers and bade him open his mouth to be gagged.

"To-morrow," he remarked to the unhappy wretch, "at matins you may be released. Meanwhile, heart up! you are not alone. You have your comrades for company." And he glanced down at the others lying still in death.

"Stay," said St. Georges, "ere you put the gag in his mouth let me ask him one question. – Who," turning to the shivering creature before him, "who was your leader? Answer me that, and even now you shall go free. Answer!"

For a moment the man hesitated – doubtless he was wondering if he could not invent some name which might pass for a real one, and so give him his freedom – then, perhaps because his inventive powers were not great, or – which was more probable – his captor might have some means of knowing that he was lying, he answered:

"I do not know. I never saw him before."

"You do not know, or will not tell – which?"

"I do not know."

"Whence came he to your village? From what quarter?"

"The north road. The great road from Paris. He had not come many leagues; his horse was fresh."

"So! What was he like? He did not wear his burganet all the time – when he ate, for instance."

"He was young," the man replied, hoping, it may be, that by his ready answers he would earn his pardon even yet, "passably young. Of about monsieur's age. With a brown beard cropped close and gray eyes."

"Is that all you can tell?"

"It is all, monsieur. *Ayez pitié*, monsieur."

"Gag him," said St. Georges to Boussac, "and let us go."

So they left the fellow gagged and bound, and rode on once more upon their road, passing swiftly through Aignay-le-Duc without stopping.

"For," said St. Georges, "badly as we want rest, we must not halt here. To-morrow those dead men will be found, with, perhaps, another added to their number if the frost is great to-night, as it seems like to be. We must push on for Chatillon now, even though we ride all night. Pray Heaven our horses do not drop on the road!"

So through Aignay-le-Duc they went, clattering up the one wretched street, their animals' hoofs waking peasants from their early slumbers, and the jangling of their scabbards and steel trappings arousing the whole village. Even the *guet de nuit*— who because it was his duty to be awake was always asleep — was roused by the sound of the oncoming hoofs, and, rushing to his cabin door, cried out, "Who goes there?"

"*Cheveau-léger en service du roi*," cried St. Georges; and "*Mousquetaire de la maison du roi*," answered Boussac; and so, five minutes later, they had passed the hamlet and were once more on their road north.

"Yet," said St. Georges as, stopping to breathe their horses, he opened the cloak and gazed on his sleeping child, "I would give much to know who our enemy is — who the cruel wretch who aimed at your innocent little life. 'A young man with a fair beard and gray eyes!' the ruffian said. Who, who is he?"

And, bending over, he brushed her lips with his great mustache.

"My darling," he whispered, "I pray God that all attacks on you may be thwarted as was this one to-night; that he may raise up for you always so stout and true a protector as he who rides by my side."

"Amen!" muttered Boussac, who among his good qualities did not find himself overwhelmed with modesty. "Amen! Though," he exclaimed a second after, "he who would not fight for such an innocent as that deserves never to have one of his own."

CHAPTER VII. A REASON

Midnight was sounding from the steeples of Chatillon as the soldiers rode their tired beasts across the bridge over the Seine and through the deserted street that led up to the small guard-house, where, Boussac said, would be found the Governor of the Bailliage with some soldiers of the Montagne Regiment.

As they had come along they had naturally talked much on the attack that had been made upon them outside Aignay-le-Duc, and St. Georges had decided that, as Chatillon was the most important town on this side of Troyes, it would be his duty here to give notice to any one in authority of that attack having taken place.

"For," said he, "that it was premeditated who can doubt? The leader spoke of me as a brigand who had stolen a child, while he himself was the brigand who desired to steal my child. Then, see, Boussac, we were followed – or preceded – from Dijon by that man who warned him we were coming – merciful heavens! who could he have been? – so that it shows plainly that I am a marked man. Marked! tracked! known all along the route."

"But why? Why?" interposed Boussac. "Why is your life, the life of the *pauvrete*, aimed at? Across whose path do you and she stand?"

"That I can but guess at," replied the other; "though I have long suspected that I have powerful enemies to whom my existence was hateful." Then, since their tired horses were now walking side by side across a wide plain, at the end of which rose Chatillon, he leaned over, and, putting his hand on the mousquetaire's saddle, said gravely:

"Boussac, you have shown to-night the true metal you are made of. Listen to me; hark to a secret; though first you must assure me you will never divulge to any one that which I tell you until I give you leave. Will you promise?"

"Ay," replied Boussac. "I will." Whereon he stretched out his own hand, drawing off first the great riding gantlet he wore, and said, "There's my hand. And with it the word of a brother soldier, of a mousquetaire."

"So be it," taking the offered hand in his own. "Listen. I believe that I am the Duke de Vannes."

"What!" exclaimed Boussac, "you the Duke de Vannes! *Mon Dieu*, monsieur, this is extraordinary. But stay. You bewilder me. Your name is St. Georges – if it is as you say, it should be De la Bresse. I knew him – your father. He died at Salzbach the same day as Turenne did. And *you believe* – do you not know? Or – or did – or was –"

"Stop there, Boussac. I can suppose what you are going to say. To ask if my mother was – well, no matter. But be sure of this: if I am what I think, I am his lawful son. His heir, and myself a De Vannes, the De Vannes."

"But 'what you think!' 'what you believe yourself to be!' Do you not know?"

"No. I may be his son, I may in truth be only Monsieur St. Georges. Yet – yet – this attack on me and mine points to the presumption that I am what I believe myself to be. The cavalry soldier, St. Georges, and his helpless babe would not be worth waylaying, putting out of existence forever. De Vannes's heir would be."

"Only – again – you do not know. Does not a man know whose son he is?"

Chatillon still lay far off on the plain through which they were riding; the flickering flambeaux on its gate and walls were but little specks of light at present, and St. Georges decided that he would confide in the mousquetaire who had shown himself so good a friend that night. Moreover, Boussac had said he was of gentle blood; his being in the Mousquetaires proved it, since none were admitted who had not some claim to good birth – above all, he wanted a friend, a confidant. And as, in those days, there was scarcely any gulf between the officers of the inferior grades and the soldiers

themselves, Boussac was well fitted to be that friend and confidant. Also he knew, he felt now, since the attack of the evening, how insecure his own life was; he recognised that at any moment the little motherless child he bore on his breast might be left alone unfriended in the world. Suppose, for instance, he fell to-night in a second attack, or ere he reached Paris, in a week, or a month hence. Well! a mousquetaire whose principal duties were in Paris near the king's person would be a friend worth having!

So he told him his tale.

"My mother, a Protestant cavalier's daughter, was in Holland with her father after the execution of the king. As you know, that country was full of refugees from England. There she met my father, 'Captain St. Georges.' But at that time De Vannes was out of favour with the court; he was allied with the party of the Fronde, also he was a Protestant. And I believe he was 'Captain St. Georges,' I believe he was my mother's husband."

"Always you 'believe,' monsieur. Surely there must be proofs! Your mother, what does she say?"

"She died," went on St. Georges, "when I was two years old – suddenly of the plague that spread from Sardinia to many parts of Europe. It was because of her memory that I spared that fellow we have left behind from the infected grave. I would not condemn him to the death that robbed me of her."

"Therefore," exclaimed Boussac, "you gathered nothing from her!"

"Nothing. I cannot even remember her. Nay, some more years had to pass ere I, growing up, knew that my name was St. Georges. Then, as gradually intelligence dawned, I learned from the man with whom I lived, a Huguenot pastor at Montéreau, that I had no mother, and that my father was a soldier who could rarely find time to come and see me. Nay, was not often in Paris, and then not always able to make even so short a journey as that to Montéreau. Yet," went on St. Georges, meditatively, "he came sometimes, loaded with presents for me which he brought in the coach, and passed the day with us, being always addressed as Captain St. Georges by the pastor. Those were happy days, for he was always kind and good to me, would walk out with me hand in hand, would spend the day with me in the Forest of Fontainebleau, hard by, and would talk about my future. Yet he was sad, too; his eyes would fill with tears sometimes as he looked at me or stroked my hair, and always he asked me if I would be a soldier as he was. And always in reply I answered, 'Yes,' which seemed to please him. So I grew up, treated with more and more respect mingled with affection from the pastor as time went on; and, also, I was now taught military exercises and drilled in preparation for my future career. But as the time went on my father came less and less, though he never failed to send ample sums to provide for my education and also for my pleasures. When I asked the pastor why he never came near us, he said he was occupied with his profession, that he was away in the Palatinate with Turenne. Now, at that period, I being then about eighteen, there came frequently to Paris the story of all that was doing in the Palatinate – stories that made the blood run cold to hear. Stories of villages and towns burnt, so that never more should that region send forth enemies against Louis."

"They penetrated further than Paris and Montéreau," interrupted Boussac, "ay, even to our out-of-the-way part of France. And not only of villages and towns burnt and destroyed, but of fathers and breadwinners burnt in their beds, women ill treated, ruin everywhere. There were those who said it was not war, but rapine."

"And so I said," replied St. Georges; "once even I went so far as to say that I regretted that my father followed so cruel and bloodthirsty a man as Turenne. But the pastor stopped me, rose up in his chair in anger, bade me never say another word against him – told me that I, of all alive, had least right to judge him."

"But," exclaimed Boussac, "this does not show that the duke was your father, monsieur. The worthy pastor may have thought it wrong to encourage you in speaking ill of one –"

"Nay; listen," said St. Georges. "The year 1674 arrived, my twentieth year, when there came one night my commission in the regiment – the Nivernois. You have perhaps never seen one of these documents, Boussac, but you will ere long, I make no doubt, when your own is made out for the

Mousquetaires. Therefore, I will tell you of its strange character and wording. It was that the king, at the request of the Duc de Vannes, had been graciously pleased to appoint me to the position of *porte-drapeau* in the Nivernois under De Mailly-Sebret – a brave man, now dead – and that I was to join it in Holland. I did so, and, from that day to this, have prosecuted many inquiries as to why De Vannes should have procured me that commission. But up to now I have never received positive proof that he was my father – though still I do believe it."

"But why, why, why?" asked Boussac impatiently. "A man must have some friend who obtains him his presentation to a regiment – even I had our grand seigneur. And I never suspected *him* of being my father!"

"Doubtless you had no reason to do so. Yet, again, listen. De Vannes was killed in 1675; in the same year – a month before him – died my old friend and protector – the one man who had ever stood in the light of a parent to me. His successor found among his papers and chattels a packet addressed to me, and forwarded it by a sure hand to Holland. When I opened it I found therein a miniature of my mother – though I should not have known it was she had he not informed me of it – and also instructions that I should myself seek out the Duc de Vannes at the first opportunity and boldly ask him who my father was. 'For,' he wrote, 'he can tell you if he will, and he ought in justice to tell you. I would do so only the most solemn promise binds me to keep silence – a promise which, had I never given it, would have stood in the way of my ever being to you all that I have been – of having my life cheered by you, my dear, dear one.' I was preparing to seek the duke out, had obtained leave to do so and to join Turenne in the campaign, when, lo! the news came that both he and De Vannes were killed on the same day."

"And you know no more?" asked Boussac, as now the plain was passed, and from the watch towers of Chatillon they could hear the guard being changed. And also, as they rode up to the gate, the challenge of "Who comes there?" rang out on the frosty air.

Again the usual answer was given, "Chevau-Léger" and "Mousquetaire," and then, while the bolts were heard creaking harshly in their sockets as the gate was being opened for them, St. Georges turning to his comrade said, in answer to his last question:

"I know no more, though still my belief is fixed. But, Boussac, she at whose manoir I am bidden to stay at Troyes – the Marquise de Roquemaure – may be able to enlighten me. She was, if all reports are true, beloved by De Vannes once, and I have heard loved him. Yet they never married – perhaps because they were of different faith – and she instead married De Roquemaure, De Vannes's cousin and heir. He left a son by his first wife, who is now that heir in his place. Boussac, does any light break in on you now – can you conceive why I and my little darling asleep under my cloak should run hourly, daily risks of assassination – ay! even as to-night we have run them?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Boussac, "yes. You stand in the path of –"

"Precisely. Hush! See, the gate is open. We may enter."

The soldiers of the guard saluted St. Georges as he rode in, followed by the mousquetaire, while the officer of the night, after bowing politely to him, held out his hand, as greeting to a comrade.

"Monsieur has had a cold journey, though fine – Heavens!" he exclaimed, as he saw that the other had a strange burden under his cloak, "what does monsieur carry there?"

"A harmless child," St. Georges said, while the men of the garrison gathered round to peer at the little creature whose blue eyes were now staring at them in the rays of the great lantern that swung over the gateway. "My child, whose life would have been taken to-night by five desperadoes had it not been for this honest mousquetaire who, by Heaven's providence, happened to be riding my road."

From the soldiers around the newcomers – some risen half asleep from their wooden planks in the guard room, some already on duty and with every sense awake to its utmost – there rose a murmur of indignation that was not at all extinguished by Boussac's description of the attack in the graveyard, and at the passes made more than once at Dorine under his own guard and the *chevau-léger's* arm.

"*Grand Dieu!*" exclaimed the officer, "five men attack two, and one burdened with a little child under his arm. Of what appearance were these assassins?"

St. Georges described them as well as he could – mentioning in particular the leader, who wore the burganet, and the fellow who skulked outside the fight – the man who, the comrades knew, had brought the news from Dijon that they were on the road. And then from all who surrounded those fresh comers there arose a hubbub, a babel of sound that drowned everything like intelligible question or answer.

"A man who wore a burganet," one cried; "a rusty thing that would have disgraced the days of the Bearnais." "*Fichte!*" hissed another, "you have come an hour too late." "'Twas but at midnight," exclaimed a third, "that he rode through – ten minutes of midnight. And, by good chance for him, it was to-night, since 'tis the last of our New-Year carousals; to-morrow the town will be closed at dusk as usual."

"But where – where is he gone?" asked St. Georges.

"*Corbleu!*" exclaimed the officer, "we had no right to ask him, since both this and the other gates were open. Yet, stay; has he left the town yet? It may be not."

"Ay! but he has, though," exclaimed a boyish young officer who at this moment joined the group. "In truth, he has. I was at the north gate as he clattered up to it, calling out that he must go through. 'And why the devil must you?' I asked, not liking the fellow's tone, which sounded hollow enough through the rusty iron pot on his head. 'I have been attacked,' he said; 'nigh murdered by some ruffians, and am wounded. I must get me home.' 'And where is your home?' I asked. 'Beyond Bar,' he replied; 'for Heaven's sake, do not stop me!' Whereon," continued the young officer, "since I had no right whatever to prevent his exit, I let him go, and a second afterward the clock struck midnight, and we clapped the gate behind him. Yet, ere that was done, I saw him spurring along the north road as though the devil, or a king's exempt, were after him."

"The north road!" St. Georges said in a low voice to Boussac. "The north road! You hear? And the north road leads to De Roquemaure's manoir."

CHAPTER VIII. DRAWING NEAR

Two days later, when again the wintry evening was fast approaching, St. Georges, by now alone, drew near to the ancient city of Troyes. So near, indeed, had he arrived that its walls and fortifications were plainly visible to him, and from its steeples the bells could be heard, either chiming the hour or summoning the inhabitants to evening worship. Beneath his cloak, as ever, he bore his precious burden, who showed no signs of being fatigued by the long journey she had made in so rough a fashion, but often woke up and, thrusting her little head from out the folds of the cloak, smiled up into the face of her father.

He had parted with Boussac at Bar, leaving him there surrounded by his comrades of two troops of the Mousquetaires Noirs, from whom he had received the joyful intelligence that they were soon to move on to Paris, to be quartered at Versailles, while two other troops of the "Gris" were to replace them – a piece of news that had given St. Georges almost as much pleasure as it had done to the other. For it seemed to him that, should aught take him away from Paris when he had left the child in the house of the Sieur Blecy in the Rue de Timoleon, there was one faithful friend on whom he could rely to keep watch over it and see to its welfare.

"And be sure," said the mousquetaire, "that I will do so. Monsieur St. Georges, we are friends now in spite of our difference in military rank; we have fought side by side; if you are not there to guard your child, I shall be. Meanwhile, prosecute your inquiries as to the rank and position – ay, and the fortune! – you believe, is yours, and may the good God put you in the right way! Farewell, monsieur, and Heaven bless you! You know where I may be communicated with; let me know also where I may send to you," and he stooped down and kissed the child ere he grasped the other's hand as he prepared to mount his horse.

"Adieu," St. Georges said, "adieu, friend. You helped me to save her life once. For that I thank you, am bound to you forever. I pray Heaven that, if she should need it, you may be by to do so again." Whereon, with a farewell to his new friend and to several officers and men who had all testified as much interest in him and his charge as those others had done at Chatillon, he set forth once more upon another stage of his journey.

Both at Chatillon and in Bar, which he was now leaving behind, he and Boussac had spoken to those whose duty it was to keep an eye to the safety of the highroads, and had informed the captain of the *maréchausse* – or mounted patrol of the highroads – of the attack that had been made on them. But this official had only shrugged his shoulders and remarked that "it was possible, very possible."

"Louvois," he said, "is responsible for all. Either he denudes the country of men to send on his campaigns, so that none are left to guard it, or, the campaigns being over, he pours back into it thousands of disbanded soldiers who, for want of aught else to do, become *filous* and *spadassins*. What would you? And according to your own account, monsieur, you and your friend, the mousquetaire, could take good care of yourselves."

"These were neither *filous* nor *spadassins*," replied St. Georges, "or at least the leader was not. Oh! that I may meet him again, and when I am not encumbered with a harmless child to protect!"

"You know him, then, monsieur?"

"No. And since he carefully disguised his face as well as protected his head, I may not even assert that I have ever seen him. But I suspect."

"Tell me the name of him you suspect, and I may do something – may call upon him to answer your charge."

"Nay," replied St. Georges, "that cannot be. For I must not tarry here; I have the king's orders to ride straight for my destination, halting no more than is necessary; and so, perforce, I must go on. But should you hear of a man wearing an ancient burget whose appearance in your neighbourhood

seems suspicious, and who" – remembering the description given by the man they had gagged and left tied to the tree at Aignay-le-Duc – "is young, with a brown beard cropped close and gray eyes, I pray you question him as to his doings two nights ago. It may save your roads from further brigandage, and – should you confine him for any length of time – his life from my sword. For, I promise you, if ever I encounter him again, and am sure of my man, he shall not escape a second time."

"*Mon Dieu!*" replied the captain of the *maréchausse*, "if he falls into our hands I will warrant him against your sword. If we can but bring his attack on you at Aignay-le-Duc home to him, it will be the wheel and not the sword with which he will find his account."

"So best. Yet I doubt your catching him, and must believe and hope the punishment he deserves shall reach him through my hand. If it is he whom I think, he is of high position."

"Many of high position have come to the wheel when in our grip," said the fierce old captain, a man who had followed his trade under Condé. "*Ma foi!* we have great powers, we of the *maréchausse*, and for brigandage on the king's highway we use those powers swiftly. Poof! If we catch him and bring his vagabondage home to him, he will be broken all to pieces before his position is of any avail."

So in this frame of mind St. Georges left the old man, and now, as night drew on, he neared Troyes.

All day he had pondered on the meeting that was before him – on the fact that he was about to encounter the woman who had once loved so dearly the man he believed to be his father. For, that he would meet her, stand face to face with her, he supposed was certain. She would scarce let an officer of the *chevaux-légers* stay in her house – sent there by the king's orders – and not summon him to her presence. Moreover, did he not go there, as that evil-seeming bishop had said, so that he might also hear a word possessing great significance to both the king and his minister? A word of similar import to the one the bishop had himself sent!

"Yet," he pondered, as now the hum from the busy old city reached his ears and he saw its smoke rising in the evening air, "yet, does she know who I am, whom I believe myself to be? Ha!" as a thought struck him, "how else should it be? If De Roquemaure, her son, or stepson, knows, then she must know too. And – and does she, too, wish me dead – and you – you, also, my darling," with a pressure of his arm against his burden, "as well? *Mon Dieu!* If that is so, then it is to the lion's jaws I am going in entering this manoir of hers. No matter! I will do it. It is in the king's name I present myself; let us see who dares assault his messenger. And," he muttered fiercely to himself, "if her whelp, De Roquemaure, is the man with the brown beard – the man whose voice I shall know in a thousand, although it reached me before through iron bars – he shall have one more chance at my life in spite of his lady mother." And he clinched his white teeth as he reflected thus.

Knowing what he did, namely, that "the whelp, De Roquemaure," as he had termed him, was heir in a year or two to De Vannes's great fortune, and coupling with that fact that he and his child had been attacked in a neighbourhood at no great distance from Troyes, he had begun on his solitary ride this day to speculate as to whether the whole of his journey, his sudden summons from Pontarlier to Paris, was not some deeply devised plot to remove him out of existence. For, although he had long suspected who and what he was, might it not be the case that those in whose light he stood had only recently learned that such was the case? And, if such were the fact, what a revelation, what a blow, such knowledge would be to them! They had doubtless long looked forward to the enjoyment of the Duc de Vannes's wealth; if they had now discovered that the possession of that wealth might be disputed, what more likely than that they should endeavour to remove for ever from their path the two – himself and his child – who could so dispute it with them?

"Yet," he had mused all through that day, "how know it since I, of all people, have no certain knowledge; how, above all, learn that their opportunity had come? How know that I who stand between them and their greed should pass upon their way, come across their path? Bah!" he finally exclaimed, "it is a coincidence that I should so travel their road, seek shelter in the house that my father's heir dwells in. It may be that when I see this young De Roquemaure he shall in no way

resemble that night assassin who attacked me; it may be that his mother no more dreams that she is about to see the son of the man she loved than that she will ever see him again in life."

Yet, even as he so decided, he knew that there was more than coincidence in it. He knew that those who had attacked him and Boussac at Aignay-le-Duc were more than common bravos. Otherwise the child's life would not have been sought as fiercely as his own; the spy, whomsoever he might be, would not have ridden so many leagues from Dijon to carry the news of his approach.

Therefore, in spite of his attempted dismissal of all his doubts and suspicions, he resolved that, above all, he would be cautious as regarded one thing – his child. She, at least, was under no orders to seek shelter in the manoir; the roof that covered this marquise and her stepson should never be slept under by Dorine.

"All women's hearts," he murmured, "go out to my motherless babe, strangers though they be. There must be many such in this old city, and one such I will find. If as – God help me! – I must suppose, this she-wolf and her husband's son seek our lives, at least they shall get no chance at hers. The mistress of a common inn, a warder's wife, will keep her in greater safety than she may be under the roof-tree of madame la marquise."

The gates of Troyes were not yet shut – the city having too much traffic with the outlying hamlets to permit of their being closed early – so that St. Georges rode in without any formalities beyond replying to the usual questions as to who he was and what was his business, and, passing slowly into the quaint streets, soon came to a great *auberge* which looked as though suitable for the purpose he required, a shelter for the child. In the vast kitchen, or hall, through whose diamond-paned windows he could see perfectly, he perceived a young bare-armed woman cooking at a large fireplace, while around her at wooden tables sat the usual company of such places – men drinking in groups or eating from platters which another woman brought from the first and set before them. So he rode in under the great gateway and called loudly for an hostler to come.

At his summons a man came forth who, seeing his soldier-like appearance, asked if he desired to rest there for the night, and stated at the same time that the inn was very full.

"That may be so," replied St. Georges, "yet, perhaps, not so full but that a child can be sheltered here for one night. See, friend," he continued, opening his cloak, "I bear one here who has been carried far by me. Think you the hostess will give her protection? She needs a good bed sorely."

As it always was – to the credit of humanity – the sight of the little helpless thing sleeping on its father's arm roused this man's sympathy as it had roused that of all others.

"*Ma foi!*" he said, stooping to gaze at it as it lay on that arm, "a rude cradle for *la petite*. Yet – there is no hostess; the landlord's wife is dead. And why – why – do you leave it? Why not stay yourself?"

"I have to present myself to the Marquise de Roquemaure at her manoir. Where is that manoir? Heaven grant I have not passed it on the road!"

"Half a league outside the city – to the north, on the Paris road. If you have come from the south, you have not passed it."

"So! It is from the south I come. Now, quick, can I leave the child here – in safety?"

"I will see. Wait." And he went away toward the kitchen, leaving St. Georges standing by his horse easing its saddle, and then holding a bucket of water, which he had picked up, to its thirsty mouth with his disengaged hand.

Presently the man came back, followed by one of the young women whom St. Georges had seen waiting on the company – a dark girl with her arms bare – a girl whose face looked kind and honest. And again with her, as with the others, her heart went out to the little child in the great man's arms. The sense of helplessness, of dependence on so unusual a nurse, touched all those hearts, especially feminine ones.

Briefly as might be he explained to her what it was he required – a night's shelter for and watchfulness over the child, he having to visit the Manoir de Roquemaure. Also, he said, he would come back early in the morning to fetch it away.

"If," said the girl, a little hesitatingly, for she was but a waitress at the inn, "monsieur will intrust the child to me – it is a pretty thing, and see – see – how tired it is! – how it yawns! – then I will do my best. It may sleep with me, and I am used to children. I have several little sisters whom I saw to after my mother's death and before I took service."

"I will intrust it to you most thankfully," St. Georges replied. "Your face is honest, my girl, and true."

So – telling her, as he had told others on his road, that the child was motherless – he kissed it, and bade it good-night, saying inwardly, as he ever said when he parted from it, a little prayer that God would guard and have it in his keeping, and so let the waitress take it away. But, because something told him he was in a dangerous neighbourhood, he impressed upon her that she should in no way leave it more than was absolutely necessary; above all, he begged her and the hostler, who was a witness to the proceedings, to remember that they need say nothing about a child having been left in her care. And they, with many protestations that they would not chatter, assured him that he need be under no apprehension.

"I take my rest," the girl said, "at the close of day. The child shall not leave me till I rise at dawn, nor, indeed, until monsieur returns. I promise."

Then he let her go away with it, and busied himself next with his horse, seeing that it was rubbed down and freshened with a feed. "For," said he, patting its flank, "you have another league to do, my friend, ere your rest comes." And the animal being refreshed, he gave the hostler a piece of silver as earnest of more in the morning if he found he had not been chattering, and so made for the North Gate.

"And now," he said to himself as he passed out, "for the house of the woman De Vannes loved, the house of the man who, I believe, thirsts for my life and the life of my child."

CHAPTER IX. A ROYAL SUMMONS

"La plus cruelle de toutes les voies par laquelle le roi fut instruit bien des années fut celle de l'ouverture des lettres. Il est incroyable combien des gens de toutes les sortes en furent plus ou moins perdus."

St. Simon.

A fortnight before St. Georges had set out upon his long and, as it had already proved, hazardous ride from Pontarlier to Paris, four men were busily employed in a small, neatly furnished *cabinet* at Versailles – a little apartment that partook more of the appearance of a bureau, or office, than aught else.

Two were seated at a table facing each other; behind each of these was one of the others, who handed them papers rapidly drawn from portfolios which they carried. Of the men who were seated, the one with his hat on and wearing a costume of brown velvet – because already the days were very cold – was Louis the Fourteenth; the other, whose manner was extremely rough and coarse – indeed brutal, except when addressing the king himself – was Louvois, the Minister of War, ostensibly, but in reality the one minister who had his fingers in all the business of the state. Those standing behind each of the others were Pajot and Rouillier, who farmed the postal service from the crown.

"*Finissons*," said Louis, in the low clear voice that expressed, according to all reports, more authority than even the trumpet tones of many of his great commanders – "*finissons*. The morning wears away. What remains to be done?" Then in a rich murmur he said: "It has not been too interesting to-day. My subjects are losing the art of letter-writing."

On the table there lay five large portfolios bound in purple leather and impressed with a crown and the letters L. R. Also upon each was stamped a description of its contents. On one was inscribed, in French of course, "Letters opened at the Post"; another "Conduct of Princes and Lords"; a third bore upon it "Private Life of Bishops and Prelates"; a fourth, "Private Life of Ecclesiastics"; and the fifth, "Report of the Lieutenant of the Police."

Furnished thus with these five reports, which reached his august hands and were inspected weekly by his august eyes, Louis considered that the whole of his subjects' existences were, if not known to him, at least very likely at some period or other to come under his supervision. What he did not know, however, was that Louvois, who was the originator of the odious system of opening letters sent through the post, did not always show to him those epistles which came first into his own hands. Therefore in this case, as in many others before and after the days of Louis *le Dieudonné*, the valet was a greater man than his master.

It was the case now – as it had often been! – the king had seen some threescore letters marked with the senders' names or initials; and there was one he had not seen.

He seemed a little weary this morning – nay, had he not been so great a king, as well as a man who had almost every impulse under control, it would almost have appeared that he was a little irritated at the contents of the first portfolio, that one inscribed "Letters opened at the Post." "For," he continued, after descanting on the art of letter-writing which his subjects appeared to have lost, "the responsibility given to the masters of our royal post seems to me, my good Louvois, to be greater than their minds – provincial in most cases – appear able to sustain. They mark letters from the local seigneurs as worthy of perusal by us in Paris ere being forwarded to their destination, which, in truth, are barren of interest. To wit," he went on, with that delicate irony for which he was noted, "we have opened fifty-five letters, and in not one of them is there the slightest hint of even murmuring against our royal authority, no suggestion of resisting our, or the seigniorial, imposts, not even the faintest suggestion of an attack against our royal person. They are harmless, and consequently wearisome."

"I regret," replied Louvois, softening his raucous voice to the tones absolutely necessary when addressing Louis, "that your Majesty finds the system so barren of interest. But, I may with all deference suggest, perhaps, that it has one gratifying result. All these letters are from the most important persons among your Majesty's subjects, yet there is, as your Majesty observes, no one word hostile to your rule or sacred person. The system – my system – testifies at least to that agreeable fact."

"Yes," replied the king, in the calm, unruffled voice, "it testifies to that. You are right. What else is there to do?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.