

JOHN BLOUNDELLE-BURTON

CLASH OF ARMS

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Clash of Arms / A Romance:

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CHAPTER I

THE BRAVO

"If," said the sick man, a little complainingly, perhaps a little peevishly, "he comes not soon, he is as like as not to see me in my coffin. Yet," he added a moment later, "he was ever used to keep his word. With all his faults he always did that. Prided himself on it, indeed, almost as much as on the broils and fights and troubles he was always in."

"If," said the other person in the room, "he said he would come, he will come. Andrew Vause ever kept his promise."

"What did he tell the messenger who found him when he rode to London? – in a tavern, be sure! Tell me again the message he sent."

"That he would come the instant he had seen the King-which it was most urgent he should do. That His Majesty had promised him an interview for to-day, and that the moment it was over he would take horse and ride here. Also he sent you this," and the old woman drew from a pouch at her girdle a bit of paper, and, adjusting her glasses, began to read what was written on it-though

as she did so she could not resist a smile.

"Why do you laugh, Bridget?" the sick man queried, still peevishly. "Surely, knowing how near I am to death, Andrew has made no jest on me. We have not met for five years-it is quite that, come Christmas, since he has been roaming and fighting about the world-he could not do that."

"Nay, what he sends comes with a good heart, be sure. Yet I cannot help but laugh in spite of-of-," she was going to say the nearness to death in which the invalid stood, but changed it to "your poor health." "I cannot help but laugh. 'Tis a new-fangled recipe for lambswool, which he says you should drink frequently. Also, he writes that he fears you do not take sufficient creature comforts. Alas!" she exclaimed, her face clouding a little as she saw the look of annoyance on the other's, "he cannot surely guess how ill you are. Otherwise, he would scarce talk of lambswool-a draught, doubtless, he himself partakes of far too often."

"'Tis Andrew-that tells all! Andrew-the scapegrace, the ne'er-do-well, the joker and giber. Heavens! when was he ever serious, when did he ever apply himself to aught but ruffling and fighting and brawling! Yet-yet-"

"Yet, now you would see him! Long to see him! Philip Vause, you love your brother better than you think-leastways, better than you say."

"Nay, nay. I do not say I do not love him. Heavens! we all loved him. And who could help but love him, after all! Yet I would he had been more serious, would he were more serious now, as

he scarce seems to have become, judging by his his-paper about lambswool. Could he send me naught but that?"

"Remember he is not like you. You have ever been a scholar and a thinker-he a soldier and in many lands. He cannot be so sober as those who bend only over books all day, whose companions are books alone-"

"Hark!" the other interrupted. "Hark! Do you hear anything? The hoofs of a horse clattering along the road-it may be he, Bridget. Look to the window. See."

The old woman did as she was bid-going to the casement and gazing along a broad, dusty road, bordered by limes almost flowering in the warm May air, which led from the Downs above to the old house in which the Vauses had lived longer than even the parish records told of; and there, in the soft light of the fast-gathering twilight, she espied a horseman riding at a good pace; a man who, she could see very well, sat his horse easily, and seemed to extract a considerable speed from it without any effort of spur or rein.

"Ay," she said, "'tis a horseman sure enough-you have good ears, Master Philip, ailing though you be; better ears in truth than I have eyes, for they are dimmed somewhat with age; I cannot see if 'tis Andrew. Yet," she went on, as the rider drew nearer and came more into her view, while man and horse were suffused by the cherry glow of the setting sun, "'tis his form and figure, too; large, broad, and brawny. And, heaven preserve us! what a great, fierce sword clanks against his horse's ribs with every stride it

takes, and what a beard upon his upper lip he has!"

"'Tis very certain," the invalid interrupted from the couch on which he lay, "that 'tis Andrew. Here, Bridget, help me up, let me see him."

"It is he," the old woman said; "lie there, Master Philip, no need to rise. He will be here ere many moments have passed. Ha!" she exclaimed, thrusting open the lattice in her excitement, "he sees me, waves his hand—he has not forgotten the old nurse—I will go down and greet him, then bring him to you": while, excited and nervous, she unceremoniously quitted Philip Vause and ran down the broad polished staircase as fast as her old legs would carry her to where the hall door stood open to the evening air, and thus reached the stoop as the horseman drew up in front of it.

"So, Bridget," he said, leaping from his horse and flinging the reins to a serving-man who came from out the shrubbery hard by the house, "so, Bridget, 'tis you in very truth, and not a day older than when I went away, I do protest," and he stooped down over her and kissed her grey hair where it waved across her old and wrinkled forehead. And, pleased with his greeting, the woman smiled and cooed round the great man standing above her, and muttered:

"Why, Master Andrew, you are bigger than ever since you went away. What a man! What a man you are now! So great and stalwart—alas! that your poor brother Philip was as you."

Indeed, he at whom she gazed well merited the praise she

lavished on his size and thews and sinews. Full six English feet in height stood Andrew Vause, and broad and deep in chest was he, with great muscular arms that looked as though it might be ill for any caught in their grip. And, though doubtless unconsciously so to their wearer, his garments themselves lent something to his powerful appearance. On his body he wore a brown buckskin tunic-good for riding in, or, perhaps, even for turning aside a rapier or dagger thrust-a tunic ornamented at the opening with quilted leather of the same kind, and fringed in the same manner below; his lower limbs were encased in stout hose, or, at least, so much of them as could be seen betwixt the ending of his jacket and the tops of his great riding boots of brown untanned leather that reached almost to his thighs. And the sword old Bridget had spoken of was there, its hilt reposing against one of those thighs, while its long length ran behind him. A wicked-looking, fighting rapier this, with its great *pas d'âne* and enormous quillons; a rapier that looked as though, once out of its sheath, mischief was meant and to be dreaded from it. For the rest, his handsome face was bronzed to copper hue, his brown moustache-Bridget's "beard on the upper lip" – hung down below his under jaw, his thick brown hair fell to his shoulders, and above it flapped a loose sombrero hat ornamented with a single black feather.

A vastly different-looking man this from the sickly elder brother above!

"Ay, Philip!" he said in answer to her mention of his brother's name, as he strode into the tiled hall, making it ring with the

jangle of his brass spurs upon his heels. "Poor Philip! So he is sick-the messenger found me at the Duck in Westminster! – 'sick unto death,' he wrote. Bridget, is this true, and if true what ails him? He was not strong-nor like to be, since he pored ever over those accursed books! – yet books need not kill a man. What ails him, Bridget?" he repeated.

"He is not well-seems to have no life nor strength in him. And-and you know, you have heard, even in those foreign lands to which he wrote you letters-he had a grievous sorrow fall upon him. Oh! he was treacherously served!"

"Ay, ay. And so he did write. Yet, fore gad! a man dies not for love of woman-not though she jilts him cruelly. Odd's faith! no woman ever jilted me-nor spoilt my rest o' nights. Yet," and he lowered his voice a little, and seemed graver as he asked, "who was she? He never told me that-seemed, indeed, in his letters to carefully refrain from writing her name."

"Let him tell you," the old woman said; "best hear it all from him."

"But will he tell? Philip was ever somewhat too silent and secret-I doubt me much if he will tell. Will hint at wrongs done-at cruel treatments-be vague, but say no more."

"I think he will tell you," she replied. "He has longed so to see you since he knew you had returned from France. And, Andrew," the old woman said, laying her hand on the sleeve of the great stalwart soldier whom, as a lad, she had dandled on her knee, "I think he cherishes hopes of revenge on her; above all, on him

who did the greater wrong."

"Revenge! Why! what can he do? Unable to leave his chamber, a poor scholar who knows neither passado nor cunning fence of any kind," and the fingers of his left hand played lovingly with the hilt of his sword as he spoke, "nor has ever wandered fifty miles from this old Surrey home of ours-poor Philip! what can he do?"

But as he asked the question, there clattered down the oak staircase the high-heeled shoes worn by a waiting-maid, the wearer whereof said-though not before she had cast a glance of approval over the great sunburned man who stood before her-that her master desired to know if his brother meant not to come and see him now he had come home?

"Ay, sweetheart," that brother said, looking down on the comely girl, and winning her heart at once by that debonair manner which never failed in its effect "Ay, sweetheart, I come at once. Shall we go together, Bridget?"

"Nay," she said, "go in alone to him. There needs no witness of your meeting, and he has much to say. And, Andrew, you asked but now how he might compass revenge for the wrong done him. Can you not guess what he may hope to do-how it may come about?"

"In truth, I cannot," he answered, while his eye still glanced at the shapely waiting-maid now vanishing through a doorway to the back portion of the house, "in truth, I cannot. No thinker I, as you may remember, Bridget; 'twas ever Philip who did that for

both of us. And, had he not so thought, the Puritan justices of our boyhood would have clapped me into jail often enough, and been glad of the chance to punish my old cavalier father through me. No, if he means to get vengeance he must make it clear. I will go and see him now."

He strode towards the wide staircase as he spoke, and mounted it, clattering still as he went; looking round the old hall, though, while he did so, and thinking-wanderer as he had been-that, after all, it was good to be under the old roof once more.

"Well enough and pleasant," he muttered to himself, "the life of camps and noise of brawls and battles and the sweet clash of steel 'gainst steel-yet good, too, to come home, now and again."

And, because he was not all a bravo nor free lance who lived only for such fortune as came at the sword's point, his thoughts went back to his childhood's day, when he used to come leaping down those stairs three steps at a time, or swung by his gentle mother's side, his hand in hers; also, he recalled her soft looks and words, and found himself remembering the little simple prayers she had taught him to say.

But by now he was at the head of the stairs, which made but one turn from the hall to the corridor above, and at that head was the door of the chief room of the old house, the room in which he knew his elder brother lay. Then he knocked gently, and, hearing Philip's eager tones of welcome, went in to him, bearing about him, as it seemed to the poor invalid, an atmosphere of health and strength, and a suggestion of fresh air and the wind that comes

sweeping across salt seas and breezy downs and moorlands.

"And now!" Philip exclaimed, sitting up on his couch and holding out his two thin, white hands to the swart soldier, who came in and seized them in his own strong grasp, "now, Andrew, you have come back to me."

It seemed to Philip, lying there, that the voice of that younger brother was not as strong and powerful as he remembered it to have been once-seemed not, indeed, to be the fierce tones that the soldier of fortune should possess-as, stooping down on one knee so as better to bring his face on a level with his brother's, Andrew said very gently:

"Philip! Philip! how is it that I find you thus? Oh, Philip!" and he turned his face away for some reason as he spoke, "I did not know, never guessed, you were as worn and sick as this."

Then the other understood why the bronzed face had been turned from him, and why the strong masterful voice had been so gentle when he spoke. For, as Andrew turned back that face, the dark eyes were full and running over with tears that coursed each other down the brown cheeks, and a sob broke from his lips.

"Nay, nay," Philip said, laying his hand on the long locks of the other and stroking them. "Nay, Andrew, do not weep-I cannot bear that. You are so strong and big, you must not weep, and-and-tears are not for a soldier. Andrew, do not weep for me."

But the brawler and ruffler made no answer, only, bending his head still lower to his brother's shoulder, he let it lie there. And again he muttered:

"I did not understand. I did not know."

CHAPTER II

THE WRONG THAT WAS DONE

"Tell me all, Philip," Andrew Vause said to his brother some two or three evenings later, as he sat in the sick man's room, "tell me all. I must know what has brought you to this." While, as he spoke, there came a frown upon his face that did not pass off for a while-not, indeed, until he had taken two deep draughts from a tankard that stood by his side, and which old Bridget ever brought in and placed near to his hand when he went to spend an hour or so with Philip.

Full of excitement as this man's life had been for years-since the soldier of fortune had fought at Candia, and at Choczim with Sobieski, and taken part in many other frays, to say nothing of countless skirmishes-he was now as gentle a companion as Philip could have desired. Nay, sometimes, old Bridget would almost grow jealous as she observed how softly he could turn and smooth a pillow, or sit patiently by his brother listening to many of the querulous complaints usual to some invalids, or, to while away the dreary hours of that poor invalid, would tell him of courts and camps and strange doings in other lands. So jealous, indeed, did the old woman grow-or think she had grown-that she would forbid Andrew the sick room except at stated hours, and, pretending that it was not good for him to pass his days there,

bid him go off and ride upon the downs, or attend the hawking parties of a neighbouring squire, or take a rod and catch a dish of trout in the stream.

And Andrew would obey the old nurse, who had brought him and his brother up from boyhood and domineered over them, as meekly as though he had never roared orders to squadrons and troops in the face of hordes of Turks and Imperialists, or taken the word of command from Condé and Turenne; and would wander idly forth until the hours came round when he might go and sit by Philip's side.

Yet he found those hours pass slowly and leaden-footedly along, being unable to take much pleasure from the simple country amusements he was surrounded by. His horse was his chief companion, and, since he saw always to its food and litter and its careful grooming, found him some occupation, while he had made friends with two old half-bred watchdogs who roamed about the place, and, at last, attached themselves so to him that they ever attended at his heels when he went on foot.

One day, too, he nearly frightened the sexton of the village church to death by suddenly bursting through the half-open door and tramping down the aisle to a large yawning pew beneath the pulpit, and entering therein.

"Good sir," the old man quavered, looking almost in fear and trembling at the swarthy cavalier before him, "this is the pew of the Vause family from the Grange hard by; none enter it—"

"Ay, 'tis, James," the intruder answered the astonished old

man. "Wherefore I am here." Then he thrust his hands through his thick matted hair and put it aside from his brow, and went on: "Because I, too, am a Vause. Hast forgotten me, James?"

"Lord sakes!" the old man piped through his toothless gums, while he regarded the brown face and noticed the scar that ran adown his cheek, "'tis Master Andrew. And so it is. I mind me I did hear that you were back from foreign lands." Then, because some cheery, pleasant memory rose to his mind, his wrinkled old face broke into a smile, and he put out a gnarled hand and placed it on the buckskin sleeve of the adventurer, and said, "You take me back a twenty year and more, Master Andrew, and I recall how, when I looked not, or was a-digging of some grave, you pelted me with mine own windfalls. And how brave you look, and great and strong. Hast none of thy great strength to spare for Master Philip?"

"I would I had," said Andrew, "in very truth I do. He is sore pressed." Then he took the old hand in his own and shook it-leaving in it a shining new silver crown-and said:

"Leave me here awhile, James. It comes not oft that I can sit beneath my mother's monument-may never come again. Leave me awhile."

The windows of the church were open this bright May day, and through them he heard the dronings of the bees, the bleat of growing lambs and all the sweet country sounds, as he gazed above upon the quaint monument which his brother had had put up to their parents, Philip and Alice Vause. And back

to his memory there came again his boyish days, his own turbulent youth and the gentle boyhood of his brother, and how the latter had ever interceded 'twixt him and their father-a stern, disappointed cavalier-saving him many a welting from the paternal cane. And again he thought of the mother he had loved so dear, recalled how she, too, had protected him from many a chastisement, and, as he did so, bent his head forward to the pew rail and said some kind of prayer. Perhaps he prayed for Philip's life to be spared, perhaps-

Yet the days passed very slowly with him; he grew sick and weary of the trout stream and old Squire Giles's hawkings, and the village greens to which he would wander and take a part in quarter-staff with the yokels, or, stripping off his jacket, would, with their simple foils, show them some passes which set them gaping wide with wonder and musing on where Master Andrew had learnt such tricks of fence.

Sick and weary, yet he knew he must not go away. Not yet, at least. Philip grew weaker day by day; the warm end of May and the coming of the leafy June brought no access of strength, but rather greater lassitude. And Andrew, though used to seeing sudden death only-death dealt out by shot and fire and ball, death swift and instantaneous-knew that, when the great summer heats had come, Philip would be no more. The village chirurgeon had told him this, had said that the end drew very near; the lungs were growing weaker day by day, the heart-beats becoming more feeble. Yet he needed no telling-he could see for himself.

But still he did not know who it was who had treated his loved brother so cruelly-and the time was slipping by! Then, at last, on this night, when he said, "tell me all, Philip. I must know what has brought you to this pass," the other seemed disposed to begin his story; perhaps because he, too, knew the hour was near at hand when there would be no more opportunity for the telling thereof. It was so warm that the lattice was open, and Philip, lying on the couch, was opposite to his brother sitting by the open window and inhaling the perfume of the swift-flowering woodbine, and watching the laburnum branches as the soft south wind beat them gently against the casement.

Then suddenly, as though nerved all at once to confide in him he loved, the sick man began:

"I was in London when I met her first: attending the Court, seeking to get from the restored King some recognition of our father's services to his father and his cause. Enough of that-you understand the reward of the Cavalier and the Cavalier's children! A well-bred bow, acquired in courts and cities such as you have seen and know, a winning smile, a gracious greeting, and a blessing-from his lips! a promise-never fulfilled."

"Put not your trust in princes," muttered Andrew, who had not forgotten the regularity with which his mother had taken him to the village church in days gone by.

"Ay; in him least of all. But you know him, you saw him a while ago; perhaps he gave you a promise too-if so, believe it not. Unless it be for his own purpose it will not be fulfilled."

Andrew shrugged his shoulders, and the other went on.

"She was there, fresh come from Dorsetshire, attached to the Duchess of York. Andrew," and he raised himself a little on his elbow as he spoke, "even now, sometimes, by day and night, as I think of it, it seems impossible she could have been so false to me. For, that falsehood should lurk behind her pure innocent eyes, be hidden under her gentle manner, appears incredible. Yet-yet-she was as false as hell."

Andrew shifted his seat a little, crossed the other leg, and said, "Go on."

"Not much to tell. I loved her; she said that she loved me. So we were engaged to be married. She came here on a visit-she and a friend of hers-and I was very frank with her; told her this must be her home, that our life would be easy, but not luxurious, and she answered, 'It was enough. She cared nothing for Courts, and was only in the suite of the Duchess at her father's desire.'" He paused a moment, then he repeated, "We were engaged to be married."

"Humph!" said Andrew.

"Engaged to be married-the day was fixed. Then-then-oh! Andrew, I never heard from her nor saw her again."

"What had befallen?" asked his brother, gazing, as it seemed, almost listlessly out at the laburnum branches swaying against the diamond panes. "What?"

"Treachery of the deepest, blackest kind. I could have borne very well that she should not love me, but that she should treat

me thus-flout and despise me, leave me without a word of regret—that I cannot bear. It has broken my heart."

"Did it do that?" and Andrew's voice was low-thick-as he asked the question.

"Ay, it did. I learnt afterwards from the friend who came with her here, also from her father—who cursed her name as I stood before him in his Dorsetshire home, to which I had gone to seek for her—that for some time, some weeks, she had been much with a Frenchman, a man who had come over with the woman now made Duchess of Portsmouth; that soon 'twas thought they were lovers. And then, one day, they were gone—to France."

"Her name?" asked Andrew, briefly.

"Marion Wyatt."

"And his—this Frenchman's?"

"De Bois-Vallée. He was termed the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée. They said of him that he was a discarded lover of the Frenchwoman, who threw him over when she learned that she was to be the favourite of a King—also that he had fought many duels and was so good a swordsman that he might have been a *maître d'armes*."

"So, so!" muttered Andrew, nodding his head gently. Then he muttered inwardly, "Perhaps some day we will see for this. Make trial of the Vicomte's skill." Aloud he said:

"You knew that they had gone to France? For sure you knew it?"

"Beyond all doubt. De Bois-Vallée was a bully, it seems, cared

for none, vaunted himself as a Frenchman. There was a scene 'twixt him and the woman, De K roualle-it was overheard and brought to me-they say even that Charles broke in on him-was insulted, too. And he told the Frenchwoman that, though an Englishman had deprived him of her, he was yet about to be revenged, he would not return to France alone. Tit for tat was fair play-an Englishwoman should replace her. And they say, too, that the King and the Duchess laughed at him, the former telling him he was very welcome, so that he left De K roualle behind."

"He kept his word?"

"Ay, he kept his word. The night he left for France she was missing. She had gone out to walk in the garden that gave on the Mall; she came back no more. And he had been seen, this Vicomte, up and down the Mall for some time ere night fell, a coach waiting for him. Seen peering over into the garden, and with some of his countrymen near at hand-ready, no doubt, to interfere if any came to prevent her going with him."

"Has he married her, think you?"

"Heaven knows! Yet almost I think it must be so. She jilted me, but, but-'tis hard to believe she was a wicked, wanton woman. She would not have gone with him unless they were married-or, at least, were soon to be married."

"And this was-when?"

"Three years ago, soon after the Frenchwoman came first to England, brought over in the suite of the Duchess of Orleans."

"'Tis pity you never told me all," said Andrew, "specially since

I might have made my way to Paris after Candia!"

"Andrew, I was ashamed, ashamed that even you should know it. And-and-what could you have done?"

"What!" exclaimed his brother. "What! Well! tested the skill of this *maître d'armes*-perhaps avenged you."

"It might have made a widow of her, left her alone and defenceless in a strange land."

"Possibly!" Andrew replied to this, with the careless shrug of the shoulders which he had learnt unconsciously in his foreign travel. "Possibly!" And again he spoke inwardly to himself, saying, "As I shall do yet-if he has married her."

There was silence after this for some time as they sat in the now gathering darkness, a silence only interrupted by Bridget bringing in the lamps. But when she had left them alone once more, after telling Andrew he was sitting too long with his brother, who by now should be abed, and that she would be back to assist him to it, the former spoke again.

"Bridget hinted a word," he said, "when first I came here, made suggestion that you yourself nourished hopes of punishing this man-this Vicomte de Bois-Vallée," and he pronounced the name clearly, as though to make sure he had learnt it aright-"would have done so had your health been stronger, and you more fit to cope with him."

"I-I would have done so then," poor Philip said, "had I been able to discover he had wronged her as well as me. I was mad, furious, at first. Poor swordsman as I am, I would have tried to

find him out; have hurled myself against him; have, even though he had run me through and through, striven to kill him."

"So, so!" said Andrew, "you would have done that had you kept well and strong?"

"God help me! I fear I should."

CHAPTER III

ONE SUMMER NIGHT

It was so hot a July night in Paris that all who could be so were out of doors, even the commonest people bringing forth stools and chairs, and sitting on the side-paths outside their houses to get some breath of air that might blow down the streets and alleys; while, in the courtyards of the great nobles and rich merchants, the servants did the same thing. And, as they thus took the air, their thoughts all turned to memories of country lanes and fields, and of the green woods that belted the city on all sides, and of quiet inn-gardens with bowling-greens and archery grounds; turned also, perhaps, to the recollection of cool draughts of wine gurgling pleasantly from out the lips of flasks.

A hot night, even spent thus-a hotter in taverns and tripots and drinking shops where, as always, many of the Frenchmen in Paris passed their evenings imbibing Montrachet from long-necked glasses, or red Citron from big-bowled ones, or Frontignac from goblets. So hot that jackets were thrown open, and lace fal-lals untied, and even belts loosened for coolness.

In such a way, on this hot night, sat Andrew Vause in an inn off the Rue St. Honoré, known as "Le Point du Jour" – possibly because it was chiefly patronized from nightfall to dawn by the wildest of French gallants-his jacket open and his dress generally

arranged to catch any whiff of air that might blow in from the open door. He was differently dressed now from the time when he arrived at his old home in Surrey—the jacket being of black velvet and the whole of his costume indicating that he was in mourning. For Philip had been in his grave some weeks, the great heat which came in the early June of that year having sapped from him the little vitality left, and Andrew, full of a set purpose which he had resolved on as he saw his brother's coffin lowered into the vault where so many other members of the family lay, was now in Paris bent on carrying that purpose out.

Before him on a table was a flask of wine; on the other side of the table, leaning his elbows on it, sat a Frenchman who every now and again filled his glass at the other's bidding, and then went on with the recital of some narrative to which Andrew listened attentively.

"He is," this man said, "in the *garde du corps* of Turenne, his business being always to be near the Marshal with others—to prevent his master from either being insulted or assaulted in any tumult. Naturally 'tis a light duty, Turenne being too popular just now for any such *banalités* to be perpetrated"; and the Frenchman lifted his glass to his lips and again drank—this time in a meditative manner, and as though thinking far more of something else than of the wine he was sucking down his throat. After which he continued:

"He is useful to Turenne now; doubly so, indeed. Monsieur understands that he is of Lorraine, from Remiremont.

Consequently knows well the neighbourhood."

"Of Lorraine! And fighting for France! Why! all Lorrainers, with their Duke at their head, are with the Imperialists in spite of King Louis claiming their country as a province."

"Not all, Monsieur. Not all," the Court spy, for such he was, answered with a bow and a shrug, as though deprecating the necessity for contradicting Andrew. "Many of the noblesse go against the Duke and throw in their lot with France-she protecting them from Charles of Lorraine's anger. *He* is one of them and has been since '70, when the King claimed the province again."

Whereon he filled his glass once more.

"And where is Turenne now?" asked Andrew, playing with his own glass, but drinking nothing.

"The last news came from Sintzheim, where he had just beaten Caprara. He is somewhere, therefore, in that neighbourhood."

"And Sintzheim is on the east bank of the Rhine, if I remember aright."

"So, so! Twixt Philipsburg on the Rhine and Heilbronn on the Neckar."

"Ay! thereabouts. And you are sure this man, this Camille de Bois-Vallée, is there with his master?"

"Where else? That is his post. Unless-"

"Unless?"

"He is killed. That may be. They are fighting always during the summer. In the winter they go into quarters. Some returning

to Paris who can get leave-and, then, 'tis as though forty thousand devils more than there are already here were let loose! Some stay there. The married ones mostly. He does, I think."

It was on the tip of Andrew's tongue to say, "he is married then?" but he refrained. This man might not know that-although he knew much of what took place in the higher circles in France. Instead, therefore, he contented himself by saying: "Why so? Do their wives join them?"

"*Si! Si!* They join them. And sometimes others-but no matter."

"Therefore you think he will be there-say next winter."

"Unless he is killed."

"Always, of course, unless he is killed. That is without saying."

"He is there now," the Frenchman said, filling his glass furtively and almost in a shamefaced manner at having drunk so much of what was in the bottle, "I know that. You bade me a week ago find out, discover, where he was. I have done it. You may rely on me." Then, with a slight simper and somewhat of hesitation in his voice, he said: "I have done my share of the work, monsieur."

"That is true. I will do mine," and he produced from his breast a small roll of what were evidently gold pieces-or pieces of money of some sort-and slipped it across the table into the other's palm. "Yet," said Andrew, as he did so, "I would you could have answered the other portion of my question. I would have paid you well-will pay you well now-if you can discover anything further."

The man opposite him shrugged his shoulders, while at the

same time he was slipping the rouleau into his pouch, then he said, "*Ma foi!* In such cases it is a little difficult. *Fichtre!* It is extremely difficult. This Bois-Vallée has been so much mixed up with women that-

"Hist!" exclaimed Andrew under his breath, while he made a sign to the spy to be silent awhile. Then he turned his eyes towards a table in the corner, the other following intuitively his glance.

Doing so, they rested on a young fellow who was scarce more than a lad-but an extremely good-looking one, with a pink and white complexion, now flushed a little, as though from too deep an attention having been paid to a bottle of amber-coloured wine on the table, upon which he leant his arm. He was well dressed, too, the garb he wore showing that he belonged to the wealthy classes, if not to the noble-though his clear-cut, aristocratic features proclaimed almost indubitably that he was of good birth. His coat of russet satin was enriched with red and silver cording, his satin breeches had handsome slashed seams, also showing red and silver lace, while the bows at his knees above his brown silk stockings were of deep frilled lace. His hat lay carelessly on the table where it had been tossed, and some droppings from his bottle had somewhat soaked into the rich black beaver and soiled its lace, while, unbelted from his body and with the sash belt still attached to it, a handsome silver-hilted rapier stood against the wall by his side. He wore his own hair, a bright chestnut flecked with yellow, which, as he sat with his back against the wall, with his eyes shut, shone like a new louis d'or against the somewhat

dingy background.

Andrew had thought him asleep during the time he had been holding his conversation with the informer, whom he had sent for some days since and taken into his pay, but he thought so no longer when-on that informer mentioning somewhat above his breath the name of "De Bois-Vallée" – the youth had opened a pair of dark grey eyes and fixed them on the speaker. And the manner in which he had done so gave the astute cavalier the idea that that name was not unfamiliar to him, an impression which he would have conceived earlier had he seen the lad previously open his eyes more than once when the name of the Vicomte had been mentioned.

The young man, however, closed them again directly those other glances were directed towards him, and, since Andrew Vause and his companion turned their conversation to another subject, he opened them no more, but seemed to drop of again into a sleep with his head against the wall. Then a little later he aroused himself, called the serving-man, and paying him, as well as tossing him a silver coin for his service, buckled on his rapier and left the tavern.

"Do you know the youth?" Andrew asked, as he too paid the man and arranged his jacket and neckerchief previous to leaving the place. "He was acquainted with, I will be sworn, the name of-of-the person we have been discussing."

"Nay," said the other. "Nay. Though doubtless I could discover. Shall I follow him, watch where he goes to-find out

who he is?"

"No," replied Vause. "No. I have nought to do with him, and it may well be that he knows the man; by his appearance he should be one acquainted with the Court and such circles as those which De Bois-Vallée frequents. Let be! Also, he is in Paris, and he whom I go to seek is on the Rhine. And-he knows nothing."

He did not add, which was the case, that to him, soldier of fortune and free lance as he was, all kinds of espionage were distasteful, and that, having now found out the Vicomte's whereabouts, he wanted no more spyings. This fellow had put him on the track of the man whom he had taken a vow to find and stand face to face with-that was enough. He would do the rest himself, trusting only to his own manhood and to his sword.

He briefly bade the man "good-night," therefore, with some muttered word of thanks for service rendered, and, telling him that should he need him again he would send to his lodgings, went out into the night, leaving the spy draining the last dregs from the bottle. He was staying at "Le Point du Jour" for the present, having an airy, cool room at the top of the house, but there was one duty he performed nightly ere seeking that room. That was to go to the stables in the next alley to the one in which the inn was situated, and there see that all was well with his horse-a duty no man dared neglect even though his love of his animal did not prompt him to it, so valuable an adjunct to the life and safety of the soldier was his steed. But, with Andrew Vause, the attention would have been given, even though neither he nor the

stead were ever likely to set forth on any journey of adventure together again.

Outside the tavern the air was cool and fresh, and, meditating much on all that lay before him ere the task was done which he had vowed to accomplish, he strolled leisurely along, reached the Rue St. Honoré, and so wended his way towards where the stables were, casting up his eyes as he went at the portals of a grim, deserted-looking palace over which the light of a new moon showed him a cardinal's hat carved in stone—the portals of the house where Richelieu breathed his last thirty years before.

"Ah! *votre eminence!*" he murmured, "you were a man, with all your faults, worth serving. An unscrupulous devil too," he mused, "yet one who knew good mettle when you found it. Better than the upstart Louvois, better even than the great King who now fights bloodless battles and leaves Turenne and Condé to fight the real ones. Ha! What is that? The clash of arms hard by. Where? Where?"

He soon discovered, for to his well-trained ear the metallic hiss of rapier against rapier was as good a guide as any call would have been, and, darting down a *ruelle* close by, found himself in the neighbourhood of the fight that was going on, on the cobble stones of the court.

"What!" he muttered, while he hastened forward, "three engaged. A strange duel this, or, by the Lord, two against one." Then in a moment his own great sword was out, and Andrew Vause was in his element.

At the same time he recognized one of the combatants-the fair-haired youth who had sat dozing in the tavern over his wine, now hard beset by two others-brawny, common ruffians who, Andrew made no manner of doubt, had fallen upon the well-dressed young fellow with the idea of robbery, helped at first, if necessary, by assassination. The lad was making a good fight of it, however, with his back against the wall of an empty house, and seemed to be holding his own well, although the accustomed eye of the trained soldier showed him that danger menaced the young fellow in a manner unsuspected by him.

"A higher guard," he called out as he approached, "higher, my lad. That fellow with the loose cloak on his left arm will throw it on your point else, and so disarm you. Higher-so-that's better!"

Then he reached the trio, and, for a moment, there was a cessation of hostilities.

"Ha!" said Andrew grimly, as he ran his eye over the *spadassins* who had attacked the other, "I do perceive. A little duel in which Monsieur the second is so carried away by his love of swordplay that, unwittingly, he joins in the fray. Well, we can better that. Messieurs doubtless know the gracious laws of the duello. While the principals engage, the seconds may also amuse themselves. Monsieur," to the lad, "attack your man-I will be your second and engage his friend," and the long rapier was raised to the salute in irony.

"Thanks," the young man said, feeling all the better for this breathing space, "this ruffian is my man," and in an instant he had

fallen on one of the others with such fury that he had to defend himself or be trussed like a woodcock on the spit.

"Now, Monsieur," exclaimed Andrew, "*À vous.*"

But whether it was the terrible appearance of the brawny Englishman who towered over him with swart complexion and fierce piercing eye, or whether it was the equally terrible appearance of that rapier with its long smooth blade and enormous quilloned hilt, there was now no fight in the fellow-not, at least, when it was man to man and even chances!

"I am no fighter," he muttered. "I did but think my friend got the worst of it-and so came to his assistance."

"No fighter," said Andrew quietly, yet appalling the man by his look, "no fighter! Yet you wear a sword, and use it-when the odds are two to one! Give it to me."

The man hesitated a moment and again muttered something-this time inaudibly-whereupon Andrew repeated his request for the other's sword, and, to prove that he meant what he said, administered such a swinging kick to the fellow that he reeled across the narrow *ruelle*. "Now. The sword!" he said again.

Then when it was in his hand he gazed at it a moment, thinking in truth it was too good to be owned by such as this craven hound, and, next, broke it across his knee, while, seeing the opening to a drain close by, into which the water ran in wet weather, he threw the two pieces down into it. Then he seized the owner by the collar of his jacket, and, kicking him into a doorway, flung him on the step, where he lay almost motionless.

"Come out of that," he said, "until this rencounter is over, and by all the saints in your knavish calendar I will thrust this through your gizzard," and the fellow saw the rapier flash before his blurred eyes as the other spoke.

CHAPTER IV

"WHAT HAVE I STUMBLLED ON?"

"Now," said Andrew, standing a few paces off the other two, "let us see a little skilful fence," and, his own rapier in hand, though with the point resting on the stones of the court, he looked on as a *maître d'escrime* might gaze upon two pupils practising with the foils.

"Gently, gently," he said quietly to the young fellow who was lunging furiously at his adversary, "you will lose your breath else." And, still with what seemed to that adversary, as he fought wildly, infernal calm, he added, "thrust a little lower, otherwise you may break your sword against his breast-bone. Thus you will find a better entrance. Pass through him easier. So, so. That's better"; and he stepped back and, looking on still with an easy approval, watched the encounter.

But there was no heart left in the ruffian now; moreover, he knew he was doomed, and he uttered, therefore, a piercing shriek for mercy to which his opponent, his blood well up, answered with another angry lunge.

"Well, then," exclaimed Andrew, "make an end of it. The people above are opening their windows-the watch will be here next-prick him and have done with it. Take him in the shoulder, he is not worth killing. Good! that's it. A pretty thrust."

The lad had followed his instructions perfectly, and, beating down the other's guard, had driven his point two inches into the fellow's right deltoid, which he received with a yell, his blade clattering on to the stones as it dropped from his wounded arm.

"Well done," said Andrew, "now come along." And, picking up first the rich laced beaver, which had fallen off the young fellow's head in the encounter, he took him by the arm and led him out into the Rue Richelieu.

"A little breathless, eh?" he asked, as he heard the boy's lungs working heavily. "A little blown! No matter, you fought a good fight-though they might have beaten you in the end. I see," he added, "you know something of the science."

"Yes," the other answered, while-they being now some distance from the place where he had been attacked-he leant against the wall to recover his breath. "Yes, I know something of it. And I could have done better had I not drunk that last accursed bottle. But I was athirst, as, indeed, I am now."

"Well. Well. Come into the nearest tavern and we will have another-now is the time when a cup will do you good. Yet, arrange yourself first, you are a little dishevelled, and your hat is dirty."

"Nay," said the other with a laugh, "no more taverns for me to-night. But I live hard by, was taking a short way home when those fellows set on me; come with me. There is some good wine at our house."

"Humph!" said Andrew, "the night is late-hark! there is St.

Roch striking midnight now-too late for wassailing! And-you do not know me-yet you ask me to your house!"

"Not know you! St. Denis! I do, though. I know enough to see what you are. First, an Englishman-good as you have the French your accent tells that. I wonder," he interjected, "if you are going to join Turenne? There are hundreds of your countrymen with him. Then next-"

"Ay, next?" asked Andrew, not heeding the remark about Turenne. He was going to join Turenne, or, at least, proceed to where his army was, but he had seen the boy's eyes open when the name of one was mentioned who was already with the great marshal, and, at present, he held his peace. "What next?"

"Next, you are *un brave homme*. You saved my life-certainly saved me from getting a bad wound-and prevented those vagabonds from pillaging me; they saw this, I suppose," and he touched lightly with his fingers a thick gold chain round his neck to which a medallion hung, "and wanted it. And, if you had desired, you could have slain all three of us," he continued, with another laugh that so touched Andrew's sense of humour that, scarce knowing why, he laughed too. Then the boy added, "Come, come! I must know more of you. You are a soldier, anyone can see that; well, so am I. Come, I say."

"So you are a soldier, eh?" Andrew said, taken with a liking for the young fellow and his frank open manner, and walking unresistingly now by his side towards the house he was leading him to. "A soldier. A young one, though you understand

swordplay, or will later, as well as many an older man."

"We are all soldiers in our family," his companion replied. Then he looked proudly at the great form beside him, and said, "I have made two campaigns, though I am but seventeen."

"Ay," replied Andrew, "no doubt. You French gentlemen go to the wars early, I know. I have served with many such; younger, too, than you. There was, now, at Choczim-so!" he broke off as the lad halted at a great wooden door that doubtless opened into a large courtyard, "is this your house?"

"It is," the other answered, kicking meanwhile against the lower part of the huge door, as though, thereby, to summon someone from within. "The fiend take old Pierre, he is again asleep." And he kicked once more and hammered with his fist. Then, at Andrew's thoughtful suggestion that the noise might wake his father or his lady mother, he replied:

"Never fear! My lady mother, as you politely term her, sleeps at the back looking over the garden, and my lady sisters above, while as for my father-God rest his soul! – he has been dead these twelve years. *Ciel!* Must I beat down the door!"

Even though it had been possible for him to do so, there was now, however, no necessity, since it opened a few feet at this moment, and an elderly man peering out, and seeing who was there, instantly pulled it further back to admit the young man and his companion. An elderly man who shook his head a little-perhaps from oncoming age or, maybe, from disapprobation of such hours-but who still stood aside very respectfully. Yet, from

a corner of his eye, he shot a glance up at the big frame of the man who accompanied his master.

"Pierre, you sleep atrociously," that master replied. "Every night I have to hammer and bang in the same way. However, in with you and fetch a good bottle of the Muscadel from the cellar. Quick, hurry, I say. We are athirst." Then, turning to Andrew, said, "Come, sir, I am on the *rez-de-chaussée*. It suits my habits best, my mother says. We shall not have far to go."

Following his new friend, Andrew glanced at the paved stone courtyard across which they went, the old man, Pierre, preceding them with a flambeau which he took from a socket by his lodge door and ignited. Whereby the visitor saw that he was in the house of some great family, great, possibly by rank, and undoubtedly so by wealth. The old pieces of armour hanging on the courtyard walls, burgonets, coats of mail, gambesons, scaled or of chain, lances, and swords-all symmetrically arranged-seemed to prove the former, while, as they reached the door giving entrance to the house itself, the flickering light of the torch confirmed the fact that this was no home of a mushroom family of large means, or of a rich merchant, since it shone upon a great gilt coronet above the door, and, above that, upon armorial bearings which none but nobles could possess.

Pierre, changing the flambeau for a huge wax taper, led the way down a narrow passage giving off the hall, and, throwing open a polished chestnut door over which some arras hung, ushered them into a large, comfortably furnished apartment,

though, like all the *entresols* of the period, low-roofed. Then, after lighting a dozen other wax candles which stood in lustres and sconces, he withdrew, saying he would fetch the wine.

"And quickly, too," said Andrew's host. "Dost hear, Pierre? Quick, quick."

"*Si, Monsieur le Marquis,*" the old fellow muttered, and so went off.

"Now," said the young man, "be at your ease. Take off, your sword, unlace your jacket, and repose. Here is a couch on which I have slept many an hour; there a *fauteuil* which no soldier need despise. My doting mother chose it specially. I beg you to use as much freedom as you would in your own house."

Andrew Vause accepted the gracefully proffered hospitality in the same spirit that it was offered, and sank into the luxurious *fauteuil*, while his eye, roaming round the room, observed with approval several of the objects in it. For they all corroborated what his new acquaintance had stated, that he was a soldier-nay, more, that he was a soldier either on active service or about very soon to proceed on such service. In one corner of the apartment was a bundle of swords of the military type-spadroons and two or three heavy broadswords; in another, hanging over a chair, was a *passemented justaucorps*, with military gold braid and embroidery-an almost certain sign of the owner's nobility, since scarcely any but officers of high social rank were permitted to wear this garment; also a new bridle, some horse fittings, and other things pertaining to a soldier, were strewn about.

"Now," said Andrew's host again, when Pierre had brought the wine, which, as the former held it before one of the wax lustres, sparkled like amber through its dusty, cobwebby encasing-"Now, we will drink a toast to our better acquaintance. And, first, let us know each other's names. Mine is Valentin Debrasques, commonly called the Marquis Debrasques." And as he spoke he poured out the first glass of wine, carefully following the old custom of emptying a spoonful from the top into his own glass, and passed it over to Andrew.

"And mine," replied Andrew, "is Vause. The Captain Vause late serving in the English Regiment, in Flanders and elsewhere, and to which one of our soldiers, a Lieutenant-Colonel John Churchill, has recently been appointed colonel by our King. Monsieur le Marquis, I drink your health and to our future comradeship," and he raised his glass.

Debrasques had been filling his glass as Andrew spoke, yet, by some clumsiness scarcely to have been expected from him, at the moment the latter mentioned his name, the bottle slipped in his hand, and, clinking on to the long glass beneath, broke it, while the outrunning wine deluged the tablecover. "*Peste!*" He exclaimed, his face scarlet, "I am a clumsy fellow. If I were older, one would say my hand was no longer fit to grasp a sword since it cannot hold a bottle." Then, going over to a huge buffet, on which stood several silver and parcel-gilt cups, he took down one, blew the dust out of it, and, after wiping it with his lace handkerchief, poured out some of the wine left in the flask, and,

touching Andrew's glass with it, drank to him.

"So," he said, though now his face had somewhat lost its colour, and, as Andrew thought, looked white and drawn, "you belong to our auxiliary force supplied by your King, Charles. And-and-do you proceed to join The English Regiment?"

"Yes," replied the older soldier. "Yes. Charles has given me a letter to Colonel Churchill-he is ten years younger than I, but such is fortune! Yes. I quitted the army to go home on some affairs connected with my family. Now those affairs are arranged, and I go back to serve under Turenne."

He spoke easily, yet all the time Debrasques knew that he was watching him, perhaps considering why he had been so clumsy with the bottle, and, because he himself knew what had caused him to drop it, he was far from being at ease.

"I am about to set out too," he said, after a moment's pause. "I am sent to Listenai's Dragoons. I depart on Monday next."

He still seemed, however, as he spoke, to be suffering from the nervousness which had attacked him from the time of breaking the glass and spilling some of the Muscadel; nor was that nervousness decreased by the fact that the great bronzed cavalier sitting in his fauteuil evidently perceived his state. Yet the latter, beyond keeping his dark eyes fixed on him, gave no other sign that he noticed anything.

Presently, after again filling Andrew's glass and his own goblet, which brought the contents of the flask to an end, and for which the young Marquis was profuse in apologies, offering

to call Pierre and bid him fetch another bottle-which hospitality his guest declined, vowing he would drink no more that night-he said:

"I owe you a great debt, Captain Vause, for saving me from those *filous* this evening."

"Nay, nay," interrupted Andrew, with a twirl of his black moustache, though still, as the boy saw, with his eyes upon him. "Nay, comrade for comrade, that is all. I could not hear the scraping of steel without being in the fray, and two to one was foul play. 'Tis nought."

"Let me try in some way to show, at least, that I recognize the service. Now, how do you proceed to join Colonel Churchill?"

"Humph! In the soldier's way. I have a good horse, and I must find a servant and a horse also for him. 'Tis easy. Also, I know the route. From here to Metz, then through the country of Mont Tonnerre, and so on to Heidelberg. There we shall come upon Turenne's outposts, a day later reach the main army. Is it not so?"

"That is the road. Yet, Captain Vause, let me, at least, proffer this much. You speak of a servant; 'tis not necessary. I set out on Monday, as I say; to-day is Thursday. Now, with me there go six troopers from our estate by Evreux. Till they take their place in my troop in Listenai's they will act both as escort and servants. Sir, will you not ride in my company; be my guest? 'Tis but little beyond good fellowship."

Andrew reflected a moment-strange thoughts revolving in his mind as he did so; thoughts that two incidents of the evening had

given birth to-then he spoke frankly, and said:

"*Mon brave gar*, I will. We go together."

"Good!" exclaimed Debrasques, "good! I thank you." And at last he looked once more like himself, the colour returning to his cheeks and his eyes sparkling. "Good!" Then, speaking very earnestly as Andrew rose to go-for, borne on the soft air of the night as it came through the open windows, were heard the chimes of St. Roch ringing out one o'clock-he said:

"And we are comrades-sworn? Is it not so? Whatever may-can-befall in the future, friends and comrades?"

"Why not, Monsieur Debrasques?" asked Andrew, looking down at the slight young figure before him.

"Oh! I know not. But say it, say it. Comrades and friends, no matter what befall."

"I say it," the other answered. "Comrades and friends," and he put out his great sunburned hand and took the lad's delicate one in his, while he saw the latter's fair complexion suffuse again, this time with pleasure.

The Marquis did not summon Pierre to escort his visitor to the courtyard door, but, instead, conducted him out himself, carrying in his hand a candelabra of three branches from which the candles therein threw forth a bright light. And by that light Andrew saw far better than he had seen by the taper the serving-man had earlier exchanged for the smoking flambeau, how the great square hall, with its staircase on either side, was filled with paintings of men of various periods-armed and looking, as the

boy had said, as if all had been soldiers in their day-and also with pictures of many well-favoured women in whom he seemed to trace something of a likeness to the bright grey eyes and soft complexion of Debrasques. Also he saw a nearly new full-length portrait of a man-the oils were quite fresh, he noticed, and not laid on the canvas many months-a man young and good-looking, though the hair inclined to red, while the eyes, a bright blue, had a steely, menacing glance in them, that gave to their owner a forbidding look which seemed to warn those who gazed at the portrait to take heed how they trusted him whom it depicted.

"Who is that, if I may be so bold as to ask?" inquired Andrew, pausing a moment before this painting. "One of your house, I should suppose, from its being honoured here."

"That!" said the Marquis, "that! Oh! 'tis a cousin of mine on my mother's side. She cared for him-that is why he hangs here."

And, looking down at his host, Andrew saw by the light of the candles that once more the young man's face was deathly pale.

* * * * *

"What have I stumbled on?" he mused as he sought at last his inn, after having paid the postponed visit to his horse and seen that all was well with it. "What? What? Let me reflect. In the tavern this young Marquis was startled at hearing the name of De Bois-Vallée-that beyond all doubt; in his own house he was even more startled at hearing mine-in his agitation his hand shook so

that the glass was broken by the bottle he held in it. There is some connection here! Then the picture of that crafty-looking, blue-eyed cousin whom his mother cared for-cared for! Is he then dead? And if not, who is he? Well, we will see. Time will show. "Twixt here and Heidelberg is a long ride."

And musing still, and trying to piece one thing with another, Andrew went at last to bed.

CHAPTER V

"HIS NAME IS-WHAT?"

"Sound! Sound!" said the Marquis Debrasques, addressing two of his troopers who carried long, slim trumpets over their shoulders, "Sound, I say, and let these slumberers know that two gentlemen set forth to join the army and fight the King's enemies. Sound to let them know that, in spite of Brandenburg and Zell, Swabia and Franconia, and a dozen other petty principalities under their chief, Austria, France is not afraid!"

He spoke vauntingly this fine summer morning as, it being almost four o'clock, the sun sent a thin slanting ray down the narrow street and illuminated the great carved coat of arms that stood out over the doorway of the Debrasques' house, while it lit up the archways and *ruelles* hard by; and, perhaps, the vaunt was pardonable. For above, at a heavily grilled window, his mother—who had folded him to her arms again and again through the greater part of the night, which they had spent together—looked forth, and by her side stood his two child-sisters. Also, he was going to maintain as best he might the honour of all the dead and gone Debrasques who had followed their kings and generals for centuries, and had either returned victoriously to this old house or left their bones to whiten where they fell.

Close by, his hat in hand, because of the presence of the

Marquise at the window above, and with a quiet smile upon his dark, handsome features, sat Andrew upon his great horse; himself ready to set out. Once more he had donned the buckskin tunic now, putting off for the time being his suit of velvet mourning; but, since active service would soon be near at hand, he wore his gorget. Otherwise, he carried no body armour, though in his necessaries borne by one of the pack horses which was to accompany them, was his steel back-and-breast, and also his headpiece. The fighting would not begin till the Rhine and Neckar were in sight-no need yet to encumber himself with superfluous weight!

Ringling down the length of the street, waking sleepers in their beds and causing many to leap from them and run to the windows to see what brave show was taking place beneath, was heard the blare of the two trumpets, and so, amidst their noise, the little cavalcade set forth, the young Marquis waving and kissing his hand until a turn in the narrow winding road between the houses hid those he loved from his view, while Andrew bowed again and again to the ladies.

And, still, they woke the echoes as they went on and on till the East Gate was reached and passed, and more people left their beds to peer at them and point with approval to the two cavaliers who rode ahead of the troop-the one so young and fair and debonair, the other so large and bronzed, and looking like some paladin of old, without his armour-and at the pennons which fluttered from the lances of the two foremost dragoons.

Behind them came the led horses, extra chargers for the Marquis and for Andrew, each suited to the weight of their riders-Andrew had had a difficulty to purchase one suitable to his requirements! – with other animals carrying the baggage necessary for all-changes of raiment and accoutrements for the backs and breasts of gentlemen and troopers alike, as well as spare arms and powder and ball that might-who knew! – be wanted in the enemies' neighbourhood if they missed Turenne's army. Also-this principally owing to the forethought of Madame la Marquise and an antique housekeeper who had served the Debrasques since she was a child-two other animals carried great wicker panniers in which were many things that the poor and overtaxed inns on the road (for from all parts of France reinforcements were marching to Turenne's army, sometimes, even, in whole regiments) were not likely to be able to provide. Flasks of good wine, carefully preserved meats, fine chipbread, pressed poultry and conserved fruits; all were there, as well as many other things in the way of medicines and styptics and balms for wounds. Likewise there was much provision for the animals-which Andrew had superintended-and which was perhaps the most necessary of all, for on every one of the principal roads leading to the seat of the great war now raging in the Palatinate there was scarcely any forage to be obtained, the passage of battalions and regiments having swept bare the country round.



"*Peste!*" exclaimed the Marquis as, on the tenth day, they found themselves more than half-way between Metz and Spires, and knew now that they were within measurable distance of the army, "*Peste!* there is nothing left, not so much as a drop of wine in the bottles nor a drumstick of a fowl. *Madame ma mère* should have had one more pannier packed, whereby we should have done well enough, or, better still, we might have economized our resources. And the country is as clean swept of everything as this high road. What is to become of the animals?"

"Have patience," replied Andrew, "we are now part of Turenne's force. Therefore, we must take what we can. And we have already passed baggage vans going and coming for provisions; the next must be requisitioned. That is, unless at to-night's halt we find the wherewithal."

They had by now become fast friends, sworn comrades, as they had agreed to be, and Andrew had told Debrasques much of his early days of campaigning, and how he had first joined the French army with James, Duke of York, then an exile with his brother Charles. Never once, however, had he referred to Philip and the blight that had fallen on his life, nor the reason why he was now with Debrasques on the road to join Churchill's regiment under Turenne.

"For," he pondered to himself over and over again in those ten

days, "silence is best. Also, why tell him that until I had learnt of the whereabouts of this rogue, De Bois-Vallée, it had not been my intention to repair here-but only to seek him high and low until he was found, and then stand face to face with him?"

Yet there was one thing that troubled him even as he went to seek his quarry; the recollection of one thing that might step in between him and De Bois-Vallée and rob him of that which he had come to consider would be a righteous vengeance.

"Suppose," he had mused to himself more than once, "suppose that, when he is at last before me, I discover that he never knew of Philip's existence, knew nothing of the wrong he had done him. It might be so, might well be. Although Philip was at court sometimes they seem never to have met and, if the woman he loved was a giddy, wanton thing, whose fancy turned lightly from one to another, she may never have told this Frenchman of the man she had betrayed."

Yet, even as he so meditated he put resolutely away from him the thought that this could be the case; refused to believe, or to let the belief creep into his mind, that the crafty, discarded lover of De Kéroualle did not know of the robbery he was committing. "And," he meditated also, "even should that be the case, there is still the woman to make my account with. She, at least, knew the wrong she was doing. I must find her." But, when he arrived at this point, he had to cease his self-communing, for he knew not in what way vengeance could be wreaked on her. The rapier by his side was powerless against a woman-some other form of

punishment must be sought for!

Once on their long ride-nay, more than once, indeed half a dozen times-he had turned over and over again in his mind the Marquis's strange agitation in connection with all that was of so much importance to him-the manner in which he had opened his eyes in the tavern, the startled look in them when the spy had mentioned De Bois-Vallée's name; also he recalled again and again the lad's start when he told his own name; his pallor and nervousness before the picture of that cousin whom he spoke of as having been "cared" for by his mother. "Cared for," Andrew Vause mused again, "cared for. In the past, not now!" And he asked himself: "What had that red-haired, blue-eyed cousin done to cease to be cared for by his kinswoman any longer? Unless he were dead!"

At last he could refrain no more, and as, one day, they were passing through the soft rolling country between Verdun and Metz he spoke to Debrasques, saying:

"The cousin whose portrait I saw in your hall in Paris on the night when first you welcomed me, and, afterwards, when Madame la Marquise made me an honoured guest, ere we set forth on this journey-is he dead, Debrasques? You spoke of him as one for whom her ladyship had cared. Was it death that put an end to that care? It must be so, I should suppose," and as he uttered the question he turned his eyes on the boy by his side.

Yet only to see again the look he had seen before-half terror, half supplication! - in the other's face; to note also that the bright

boyish colour, beneath the brown which had come on his cheeks during their long march, paled and disappeared at once as on that night. Wherefore Andrew cursed himself for his ill-bred curiosity as he witnessed its effect.

"No," Valentin Debrasques said, after a moment's pause, during which he leant forward and busied himself about something with his charger's bridle. "No. He is not dead."

"Forgive me," said Andrew gently. "Forgive me. I have pained you."

"Nay. Nay. Never! But-but-he is a villain, and that picture should not be there, would not be there, an I had my way. But my mother still believes, hopes-tries to believe he is not so; therefore it has not been removed."

"I am sorry," Andrew answered. "Sorry my impertinent curiosity-"

"Nay," Debrasques said. "Surely you-but-no matter." Then he exclaimed, "How good you are!"

"Good!" said Andrew, looking at him again, and wondering what he meant; pondering, indeed, whether some stroke of the sun that had beaten fiercely on them since they left Paris had not touched his brain. "Good! Good!"

"For-for-your forbearance, I mean." Yet, as he spoke, there was a look of bewilderment on the young and troubled face that mystified the other. And doubly mystified him because he had seen it there before, on the night when first the portrait met his view; also he had seen it on the face of the Marquise as he had

spoken in courteous, easy tones to her during the intermediate days ere they set out. A look of bewilderment on both their faces, as though expressing surprise that he should be invariably so much at his ease and so gentle with them. At least that was how he had read those looks, and, reading them thus, had found further proof for wonderment.

"My forbearance!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," the other stammered, evidently much distressed, though still with the perplexity growing greater in his face. "Yes, I mean to refrain from questioning further. We-I-never mention him. I hate him and despise him. I wonder you-"

"I will never," said Andrew, "wound you on that score again, at least. Henceforth I am dumb." And, to his surprise, as he spoke Debrasques put out his gauntleted hand and grasped his own with a glance of unspeakable gratitude.

Which only added further to Andrew Vause's mystification and caused him to ride on still more deeply wrapped in meditation.

And now as they drew near Neustadt at nightfall and began to speculate on what accommodation might be obtained at the inns, if any-since they knew that two regiments of Dragoons, "the King's" and "The Queen's" were marching ahead of them to reinforce Turenne, who had suffered heavily at Sintzheim-they observed that the whole heavens appeared on fire and were suffused with a bright red colour. Also, into the vast vault thus tinged, there shot up great flecks of flame of a deeper, more

crimson hue, with sometimes amid them saffron-coloured ones, while, plain against the still lingering remnants of daylight, great masses of dun-coloured smoke arose.

"*Grand Dieu!*" exclaimed Debrasques, while all, including dragoons and those who attended to the led horses, looked on amazed. "It must be the city of Spires in flames. Who has done it-Turenne or De Bournonville, who commands against him?"

"Nay," said Andrew, "no city that, in flames, my lad. Rather a dozen-if there were so many around! No city, I say. See where the flames themselves fly up to the reddened sky; observe. They rise from all points ahead of us, and, in some cases, are miles apart. Debrasques," he added solemnly, "I have seen such as this before. It has been done here before, too, I know; Tilly did it fifty years ago, and-"

"What-what-what is it?" the boy asked, the two campaigns he had followed never having shown him aught of this nature.

"This. One of the two armies has withdrawn-it must be the Imperialists, since Turenne beat them at Sintzheim-the other is destroying the land, so that no more shall his enemy find shelter nor food enough for a grasshopper. That is what it means. Yet," he exclaimed, as now the flames and the dun-coloured smoke mounted more fiercely still into the crimsoned vault above, "it is horrible, awful! My God it is awful!"

As he spoke, there soon followed confirmation of his words. Down the poplar-fringed road along which they were proceeding, there came towards them in the night the sound of many horses'

hoofs rushing madly, swiftly; and in an instant Andrew had warned Debrasques to draw aside his dragoons and followers. "We know not yet who or what they are," he said; "best stand aside and see."

On came the others even as the suggestion was followed, and although in the gloom of the night that had closed in under the trees—they knew at once by the voice of the leader that they were of their own side. Then an officer, followed by two dozen soldiers, would almost have passed them when, beneath the poplars, he saw the headpieces of the dragoons and the glisten of their trappings, and, as he did so, he roared an order to his own men to halt, after which, amidst the rattle and clang of bridles and of scabbards against spurs and horses' flanks, he called out in French:

"Speak—what troops are those?" while, as he did so, Andrew felt Debrasques' hand clutch his arm convulsively—felt, too, that hand tremble on his sleeve.

"Answer him, answer him," he said, "or he may charge us. They are treble our number."

And from the Marquis's lips there came, in response to the demand, the words:

"A detachment of Listenai's dragoons and an English officer about to join the Marshal."

"Whose voice is that?" called back the other in a tone of astonishment.

"The voice of Valentin, Marquis Debrasques."

"Ha! I thought so. So you are here, are you? Well, I have no time to waste on you. Where are the dragoons of the 'King's' and 'Queen's' regiments?"

"Ahead of us," answered the deep voice of Andrew, he noticing that Debrasques seemed more and more agitated—indeed, almost now unable to speak.

"Then they have missed their way. They should have joined by now. Have, perhaps, branched off at Kaiserslautern." Then he gave an order to the Marquis. "Ride forward at once with your party and endeavour to find them, and, if you succeed, send them on at once to Spires. There is the devil's work doing to-night."

"What work?" asked Andrew.

"Our men have lost all control of themselves and are burning the villages for miles round, while the country people are massacring all those whom they can catch alone, or in twos and threes. There is one of our soldiers hanging head downwards on a tree not half a league from here, riddled with a score of bullets, and, they say, some are being burnt if surprised when by themselves. Forward at once and find the Dragoons—they are not, at least, heated to boiling point!" and, as he spoke, Andrew heard the thud of his heels against his horse's flank and saw him rush on, followed by his men. And in the last rays of daylight, aided by the glow of countless fires, he observed that he was hatless and wigless, and that, behind him, streamed a mass of long, red-brown hair.

"Devil's work indeed!" said Andrew, turning to his

companion, and in that same light observing that the young man was pallid and his face twitching.

"Heart up, heart up, my boy!" he exclaimed. "The horrors of war must not unseat a soldier thus" – but the other interrupted him, muttering huskily:

"You did not see-not recognize?" and as he spoke the astonishment on his face was accompanied by a look of almost awestruck unbelief.

"Not see-not recognize! Why, whom should I see, or recognize? 'Fore heaven! what I heard was enough for me."

"That man," Debrasques stammered. "The leader. You did not recognize him?"

"Not I. Debrasques," turning his gaze upon him swiftly, "who is he?"

"Your-your-I mean, my cousin. The man whose picture hangs in our hall-"

"And his name is-what?"

CHAPTER VI

THE VICOMTE DE BOIS-VALLÉE

"Did he hear my question, or not?" asked Andrew of himself, as, leaving the baggage and its caretakers behind under the charge of two of the dragoons, they rode on swiftly in search of the "King's" and "Queen's" regiments which had been ahead of them all the way from Epernay, and which, since they had not kept in advance, must have branched off, as Debrasques' cousin had surmised, on the road to Kaiserslautern. "Did he hear it?"

It was impossible he should be able to answer his own question, for, even as he had asked that other one, "And his name is-what?" the Marquis had given his order to advance as well as another to those who were to remain with the baggage, and it was most probable that, in the rattle and clatter of their steeds' hoofs and their accoutrements, it had escaped the other's ears.

And now, as they again went forward-more swiftly than they had done as yet since quitting Paris-he knew that this was not the time for repeating his question. Moreover, had he not solemnly promised, all unasked though the promise had been by the Marquis, that never again would he mention his cousin? And, man of honour as he was, he knew that the promise bound him; that, even though his suspicions were growing hot and furious within him, he must be as dumb as he had vowed to be.

"Yet," he thought, "that cousin is evidently a man of mark and position in the army; soon I shall know if what my suspicions point to is the case. And then-well, there is time enough. At present our surroundings demand more than that which I seek to know and to unravel."

They did indeed! Since, as they advanced kilometre by kilometre, those surroundings became more awful. The sky was now one vast pall of fiery red stretching from horizon to horizon, yet spotted and blurred beneath in twenty different directions by dense, compact masses of flames enveloped in clouds of smoke—the flames and smoke of burning villages, homesteads, and châteaux. Also, the air rang with the sound of musket discharges, while shrieks were now and again borne to their ears by the soft wind that blew in their faces; rang with shouts and cries in French and German, and sometimes in English, and with the horribly piteous yells of horses shut in burning stables and forgotten.

Ere they had ridden a quarter of a league from where the officer who was Debrasques' cousin had passed them, they came across the body of the man he had spoken of, hanging, as he had described, head downwards from the branch of a tree, his body perforated by bullets that had evidently been fired into him after he had been strung up. That was undoubted, for beneath his head, which almost touched the ground, was a pool of blood that must have dripped from his wounds as he swung there, and which would not have been beneath him had he been shot ere hung; nor, it was certain, would he have been hung at all if already dead and

no use as a living target.

"Your countryman," said Andrew to the Marquis, as they paused a moment to regard this awful spectacle. "See to his uniform-what it is I know not, except that it is not that which we wore in the old days, and I doubt if Jack Churchill has changed it."

"I know it," said Debrasques-who had recovered somewhat his calm, as well as his colour, since he was no longer in the vicinity of his cousin-peering down from his horse at the unfortunate body on which the rays of the rising moon now shone clear. "He is of Du Plessis' corps. Observe the boar stamped on his shoulder-piece. 'Tis Du Plessis' own cognizance."

As he spoke there rose upon their ears more shouting and roaring of voices than they had observed for some time-harsh voices close by bawling in German, then shouts of approval-once they heard a raucous, guttural laugh as from some deep, full throat-next an exclamation of rage in English, and a loud call in the same tongue. "Help, help!" they heard that voice cry-though Andrew alone understood it. "Help me, save me from these bloodthirsty dogs!" After which the cries were smothered with the German roars once more, and again that savage laugh rolled forth.

"A countryman!" exclaimed Andrew, "and in dire peril. And the voices are close by. Debrasques, as I helped you, help me, help him, now," and he gave the reins to his horse and clutched his sword firmly, while he headed for where the noise and that

piteous call had come from. And, guided by him, Debrasques and the four remaining dragoons rode for the spot, being assisted to find it by a bright light that burned amongst a copse of young oaks.

Soon they reached it, crushing through saplings and great ferns and brushwood to do so, guided always by the roars of German throats, the shrieks of the Englishman, above all, by that wild, savage laugh. Reached an open spot, a grassy glade, some sixty feet square, in the middle of which stood a sturdy oak that had obtained perhaps one-half of what its full growth would be in days to come-and with, beneath its branches and piled against its trunk, a freshly-lighted fire already burning brightly; a fire composed of dry brushwood and two or three young trees hastily chopped into fagots and billets.

But it was above that fire that the real horror was, for there, swinging from the lowest branch of the young oak by a cord, head downwards, and perilously near the flames as they leaped up, was the body of the Englishman whose cries they had heard-that body being swung backwards and forwards by his struggles and convulsions, the arms thrown wildly about, and the hands clutching at space.

With a shout, Andrew, who led the way, was amongst some twenty wild Rhenish Bavarian peasants, the bright sword flashing now like a streak of phosphorus in the moonlight as it darted here and there-through one man's throat and another's breast-while the horse he bestrode flung the boors asunder as a ship's

forefoot throws off the waves, and while behind him came Debrasques and the dragoons, themselves dealing blows right and left, and their steeds trampling down those who had fallen. Then, dropping the reins upon his horse's neck, Andrew's great left hand seized the swinging man by the belt and dragged him to one side of the flames, one touch of the rapier sundered the rope, and, a moment later, the Bavarians' would-be victim was lifted up in front of him and thrown across the animal's shoulder—he was saved.

Meanwhile, those of the avengers—for such, indeed they were—men driven to madness by the destruction of their homes and crops—who were not already on the ground and dead, or senseless from their wounds, had fled into the darkness of the surrounding woods, and Andrew and his party were left in possession of the glade.

"Speak, man," said he to the Englishman he had saved, while he cut away from his feet the end of the rope that bound them together, and Debrasques held to his lips a dram from a flask, carried by one of his followers, "speak! How came you to this pass; how fell into the hands of these crazed fiends?"

"I-I" – the soldier murmured, looking round wildly, and gazing up fearfully at the great cavalier—who now towered above him since he had been laid on the grass—as though he did not recognize him as his saviour, "I-I-Oh! save me, save me!"

"You are safe, my man. Yet speak, let us know what else is doing. Are there more being served as they nearly served you?"

"Worse," the man muttered, "if worse can be. There were two of us caught by them, we were sent out to seek for the incoming cavalry-oh! the other. The other! My comrade, Roger Bates!" And he raised his hands to his eyes, all smarting and burning with the smoke that had got into them, and rubbed the lids from which the flames of the fire had singed the lashes, as it had his eyebrows and hair. "My comrade!"

"What of him?" asked Andrew solemnly, knowing that some more fearful atrocity was to meet their ears, more fearful even than this their eyes had seen. "What of him?"

"They took us together, and he-he," turning his glance to the body of an enormous peasant lying close by, with his glassy eyes turned up to the sky, while in his throat was the great stab Andrew's rapier had made, "he who laughed so at our shrieks-directed our tortures. Listen. They dug his eyes out with their knives-they are lying somewhere about-then, blinded, they turned him into that wood to find his way back to the army as best he might, or stumble in the river, or fall down and die."

Swiftly Andrew translated to Debrasques this last horror-shuddering as he did so, and causing his hearers to shudder too, all soldiers as they were! – and soon the wood re-echoed with the cries of two of the troopers as they went forth to seek the mutilated man, and, haply, to find him if still alive.

But as they so went forth they heard from afar off more shouts and cries mingling with the humane calls of the dragoons-loud yells of triumph from some large body of men coming their way-

and, not knowing what this might mean—perhaps more maddened inhabitants of the Palatinate with fresh victims! – they stood ready to either attack them or defend themselves. Yet, in an instant, Andrew Vause exclaimed, "More of my countrymen—some of Churchill's, or the Duke of Monmouth's, men—what brings them here?"

"Our countrymen are gone mad," the rescued soldier said, "mad! These Germans have illtreated us the worst of any when caught, they are all mad. Oh! if they can but catch those who blinded Roger! If they can."

As he spoke there burst into the grassy glade, directed thereto doubtless by the glimmering of the still burning fire, a score of English soldiers all in the trappings of "The English Regiment," some with their jackets torn, some with their heads bandaged up, each armed, and with their weapons bare, and some with torches in their hands. Then, seeing the group before them they rushed forward, though, on observing their comrade, they paused, astonished.

"Who are these?" one of the soldiers shouted, rolling his eyes over Andrew and Debrasques and the dragoons. "These are no Germans!"

"Nay," said Andrew, "no Germans. These are a French officer and some of his men, and I am about to join you under Colonel Churchill. What seek you?" Intuitively they all saluted him and the Marquis, then the foremost man said, "the lives of all those devils we can find, sir. They are killing, mutilating, burning all

they can come across alone-they cut the throats of the wounded after Sintzheim as they lay on the ground. We seek revenge. God!" He exclaimed, starting back as he saw the bodies of the three Germans on the ground, "What is this?"

Briefly their comrade told them all that had happened to him and Roger Bates, and how, even now, two of the French dragoons were searching for the unhappy man, and as he did so their fury became terrible. They cursed aloud the Palatinate and its inhabitants, the Imperialists and the war itself; and then, suddenly from their midst, there were thrust forth into the open two peasants, whom they had captured and dragged along with them.

"An eye for an eye," roared the leader, "life for life. We will have vengeance-none shall stay us. Roger Bates has had his eyes dug out, therefore so shall this man have his," and he pointed to one of the shivering prisoners. "You were burnt head downwards, therefore so shall this man be," and he indicated the other. "My lads, to work. Out with the eyes, some of you, some blow up the fire."

"Stop," said Andrew, "not that. There shall be no more horrors of this sort. Take all men prisoners whom you find and bring them before Marshal Turenne, but not such revenge as this."

"Who shall prevent it?" the leader asked, forgetting all respect in his fury.

"We shall," Andrew said, nodding his head to those with him, "we shall," and at the same time he whispered to Debrasques to

cause his dragoons who were searching for Bates to be recalled.

But at that moment the two troopers came back unsummoned, and between them they bore the dead body of Bates. They had found him in a brook in the wood, into which he had evidently stumbled, and from which, in his blindness, and being possibly weakened by other wounds, he had been unable to extricate himself.

Then his furious comrades, seeing the body, lost their last glimmer of reason—they were, in truth, maniacs now in their thirst for vengeance. And Andrew knew it. He whispered therefore a few hasty words to Debrasques, who divined, without knowing one word of their language, all that was occurring. After which he addressed the foremost soldier, saying:

"As I have told you, this shall not happen," and he leaped on to his horse's back as he spoke. "If you want vengeance seek it in a fitting manner from Turenne. Here it shall not be gratified. Attempt to mutilate that man or burn this one, and by the Heaven above us we will ride at and cut you down although most of us are fellow-countrymen. Now reflect." And looking at him in the moon's rays, the soldiers saw that this was one against whom they could not stand.

But at that moment there came an interruption which caused them to pause, even more than did the appearance of the fierce cavalier before them and the dragoons by his side.

Above the sound of swift-coming horses' feet there was heard a somewhat shrill, though musical, English voice, saying:

"At all hazards it must cease. Heavens! Turenne will string them up in dozens when he hears of it, as it is." And a moment later two English officers had ridden into the glade, though not before the soldiers had had time to cast dubious glances at each other, even while their fury still burnt within them, and to mutter, "the Colonel."

"Some of my men, fore gad!" the speaker said, as now the two officers were amongst the others; and he rode forward into the moonlight, his slight, active young form standing out plainly in its rays, and his handsome, youthful features being quite visible. Then, in the shrill-pitched, refined tones that had just before broken on their ears, he said:

"So you are marauding again, are you?" and, turning to his companion, he bade him take all their names. After which he ran his eyes over Vause and the Marquis, and, seeing that they were gentlemen, raised his laced hat most courteously while, bowing low over his horse's neck, he asked them in French if they were attached to the Army, and, if so, to whom he had the honour of speaking?

"I am," said Valentin with equal courtesy, "the Marquis Debrasques, on my way to join Listenai's dragoons, and have journeyed from Paris to do so. May I beg the honour of knowing to whom I am accounting for myself?"

Again the laced hat was doffed, while the speaker said:

"I am Lieutenant-Colonel John Churchill of King Charles's forces, and Colonel of 'The English Regiment,' under King

Louis, forming part of the auxiliary forces sent from England. And you, sir?" turning to Andrew. "May I, too, beg your name by right of the position I hold in this campaign?"

"My name, sir, is Vause; Captain Vause, once of the regiment which you now command. I am on my way to present myself to you with a view of serving once more with my comrades, and am the bearer of a letter to you from King Charles himself."

"Sir, you shall be very welcome," Churchill said, "as all soldiers are here." And, after the exchange of a few more courtesies, he asked for some explanation of all that had taken place in the glade—the conversation on account of the Marquis being carried on in French. A few rapid sentences from both Debrasques and Andrew served, however, to explain what had happened since they arrived on the spot, while ever, as he heard of how the batch of English soldiers had forced their way to it with their two prisoners, Churchill's eyes turned to them.

Then he addressed his men, and, speaking in so quiet a tone that none could know what he was meditating, he bade them fall in and march back to their quarters, taking the Bavarians with them, but without doing them any injury.

"And you," he said, addressing the man who had been saved from burning, "can you march, too?"

"I think so, sir. Thank God I am little hurt."

"So be it. March all." Then, while he was informing Debrasques that the "King's" and "Queen's" Dragoons had found their proper route and that he would conduct him to where his

own regiment lay, a thought seemed to strike him, and, turning to the rescued soldier, he said, "how came you here? Alone with Bates or in a party?"

"In a party, sir, before the French officer; but we missed them, and so those Germans caught us."

"What French officer?"

"I know not his name, sir." Then the man paused and hesitated, while Churchill looked calmly down at him; but after a moment he stammered, "the officer with the red hair, sir."

"Humph!" said the colonel, while in the now bright moonlight the others could see a gentle smile appear on his handsome face. "The French officer with red hair. True, he is scouting to-night." And, turning to the other who accompanied him, he said, "Without doubt, the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée."

CHAPTER VII

THE HONOUR OF THE HOUSE

The next morning about mid-day Valentin Debrasques was making his way slowly through all the numerous impediments that encumbered the ground between the spot where the dragoons of Listenai were encamped on one side of Gross-Saxen, and the town of Ladenburg where Turenne's headquarters were. It was difficult enough to progress quickly since, first, he would encounter a regiment or a battalion passing from one point to another, or next, be stopped upon his journey by a long string of baggage waggons, or the artillery with their heavy guns moving in the direction of where the Imperialists were under the command of the Duke de Bournonville-nor, indeed, was he particularly anxious to progress much more rapidly than at present he was doing.

He was engaged upon the most hateful journey which he had ever yet undertaken; was about to pay a visit to the cousin whom, not a year before, he had requested never to speak to him again. Yet, now, because he deemed it was for the honour of his house to do so, he was going to that cousin's quarters to seek an interview with him-to demand that he should receive his visit.

When Churchill had said overnight that, without doubt, the red-haired officer was the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée, the young

marquis knew that further concealment was impossible, and that the gallant soldier whose name was Vause must ere long come into contact with him-and he dreaded that contact, not for his cousin's sake, but for Vause's. For he had learnt a year ago (not from Bois-Vallée himself, but from a joint friend of theirs who had been in England at the same time as the Vicomte) of what he had done there-he had learnt, also, that the man who had been so cruelly injured was called Vause. And he remembered the name well enough-better, perhaps, than he might have remembered it had it been an ordinary English one, from the simple fact that there were many of the same name in France. He thought, therefore, that, like so many of his countrymen, this Englishman inherited his name from some French ancestor who had originally passed over to England. But, be this how it might, he did remember it as being the name of him who had been so vilely injured, and, when the man sitting in his room in Paris had said he was so called, it had agitated him to such an extent that the broken glass and the spilt wine had been the result.

Yet, still, there was one thing he could not understand-Andrew Vause showed no sign of recognition when he saw the picture hanging in his hall, nor when he saw the man himself. Had they, therefore, never met? It might be so. He knew the Englishman was a soldier who, by his own showing, had roamed about Europe fighting in one campaign and another; the wrong might have been done when his back was turned-when he was away.

It seemed, indeed, that such must be the case from the first words Andrew spoke when, Churchill and the other officer having ridden slowly ahead, they, with the dragoons as well as the baggage train, which had been sent back for, followed.

"Therefore," Andrew said, "that is De Bois-Vallée. And your cousin. So, so! A pity."

"I hoped you would never have met," the marquis said; "that you would never have known that he was here in this campaign. Never, never! We have grown firm friends-sworn comrades-and, God! it is a shame! It is from our house that the offence has come."

"Never have met!" Andrew repeated. "Never have met!" Then, after a moment's pause, he said: "Debrasques, there must be no concealment between us, come what may. It is to meet him that I am here. I have one thing to do-you need no telling what that thing is."

"I can guess. To slay the man who stole your promised wife."

"My promised wife!" looking down at him. "My promised wife!"

"Why, yes! Was she not? I had a friend in England who knew something of his villainy."

"Had she been my promised wife and fled with him thus, she might have gone hang, and, for the matter of that, so might he. No woman who could do as that woman did would have been worth a pair of crossed swords. But, unhappily for him-for this cousin of yours-the treachery was committed by them both against one

whom I loved better than myself-the gentlest soul on earth, and unable to avenge himself."

"Another Vause! Had I known that, my trepidation would not have been so great when you saw his picture-when he passed us two hours ago."

"Ay! Another Vause, my elder brother. But it makes no matter, except that, as I tell you, I shall avenge him far more than I should avenge myself. Debrasques," and he put his hand on the neck of the boy's horse as it trotted side by side with his own, "Debrasques, there is no need of concealment nor of lies and deception on my part. Listen! We stand on the threshold of a new friendship, yet, though that friendship will perforce wither and die through my future actions, I must perform them. My friend until to-morrow, at least-I am here in the Palatinate to slay your cousin."

"Yet-yet," the lad stammered, scarce knowing what to say, "that was not your intent when first we met. You said then you had returned to France to join the army."

"I returned to France to find him. But, ere I knew of the evil he had done my brother, I had procured from King Charles letters to Turenne commanding here, to Condé commanding in Flanders, one even to King Louis in command of his army in Franche-Comté, and another to Colonel Churchill now with us, for I had to be a soldier again. But, when I learnt from my brother's dying lips of what this Vicomte had done, I knew that, with those letters in my possession, I could make my way to wherever he might

be. I had heard," and Andrew looked terribly grim as he uttered these last words, "that this man had the skill of a *maître d'armes*, therefore I supposed him a soldier. In Paris, on the night I met you, I learnt that he was one. Then my resolve was taken."

"Will nothing shake it?"

"Nothing-or only one thing. Let me find out that he was absolutely without knowledge that he was injuring my brother-let it be proved to me that he did not know the woman he took away with him was an affianced wife, and I cease my quest; his death may come to him how it will. I shall not seek it. Nay, if you, Debrasques, who appear to know much of what has happened, can assure me such was the case, I cease to seek for him from this moment."

"Alas!" murmured the other, "I have no such assurance to give."

"Did he know?" asked Andrew, pressing him, "had he ever heard of the name of Vause? But, why ask? You knew my name; therefore, he knew it too."

And his companion's silence and wistful look told him that he had suspected aright.

And now, on this the following morning, the young man was winding his way through all the bustle and confusion of a great army taking breathing time between one battle and another that was imminent. And, as he pursued that way, he whispered to himself:

"If I can work on his fears so much as to force him-even in

the teeth of the enemy—to quit the field, to exchange either to the King's or Condé's army, disgrace and misery may be avoided. But, can I? Can I? Villain as he is, he is yet no coward."

It was still two hours ere the Marquis Debrasques stood face to face with his kinsman, he having been away with Turenne and several of his generals on the road to Mannheim; but, at last, the weary time passed, and the Marquis de Bois-Vallée entered the room in the farmhouse which was allotted to him for quarters, and stood before his cousin, saying as he did so:

"*Eh bien!* Monsieur le Marquis, this is an overwhelming honour and not to have been expected, in spite of my having recognized you last night. Well!" and he unbuckled his *porte-épée* and flung that and the weapon it bore into the corner of the room as he spoke, while also he removed his wig and showed thereby the auburn, red-tinged hair that was so noticeable, "to what am I to attribute that honour? Scarcely, I should imagine, to the desire to pay a visit of courtesy, since, when last we met, you forbade me ever to address you again."

Standing there before Debrasques, his lean figure (which was set off well enough by the handsome blue coat he wore, with its red facings and gold galloonings, and with, across his breast, beneath the silver gorget, the aiguillettes which showed that he was attached to the staff of the Marshal) and his light blue eyes, which he never took off his cousin, seemed to proclaim him a man of tenacious disposition. For the tall, wiry form looked as though it were capable of almost any endurance or

exercise of strength, while the steely eyes spoke of an invincible determination within.

"No visit of courtesy would have brought me here to you," replied Debrasques, who retained the common wooden chair in which he had been seated for those two hours, and from which he had not risen on his cousin's entrance. "Instead, something of a totally different nature. For the reputation of the family of which I have the honour to be the head, and of which you are a member, I desire that you shall remove yourself from this camp."

For a moment those blue eyes shot out a rapid glance at the young man seated there; then their owner said, speaking in an extraordinarily calm manner:

"Have you, *par hazard*, Monsieur le Marquis, taken leave of your senses? Are you aware of what you have asked?"

"Perfectly. I have asked you, a soldier in the face of the enemy and of the *garde du corps* of the Marshal Turenne, to quit the camp. That is what I have demanded in my senses, and is what I am anxious you should do."

Still gazing at him steadily, the Vicomte drew up another common wooden chair in front of the other, and, sitting in it and facing him, said, always in the same self-contained voice:

"There is naturally some explanation of this-I will not honour it by saying 'insulting'-request. Be good enough to give it, and then, head of our family as you are, to take yourself back to your own lines. Quick; I am much occupied with my duties, and shall be until I relinquish them at your desire."

"The explanation is, to begin with, that Captain Vause has arrived in this camp with the full determination of calling you to account for your proceedings in England some three years ago, in connection with a certain lady of that country."

"Indeed!" and now the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée allowed a smile to appear faintly on his features. "*Et après!* When he has done so, what next?"

"When he has done so," repeated Debrasques, who was as calm as the other, if not, perhaps, as skilled in word-fence. "Well, I have no doubt that, having called you to account, he will kill you."

"*Si?*" and again the other smiled. "Doubtless, therefore, he is a fire-eater. But, permit me to say once more-what next?"

"Your death will bring a scandal on our family. This I desire to prevent. The Debrasques have had their faults, probably some of their kinsmen before you have even brought scandal on that family, but no such mean action as you committed-"

"Monsieur le Marquis," the other interrupted quickly, and with no smile on his face now, "I would suggest to you a more temperate tone. Otherwise this man Vause, of whom you speak, may lose his opportunity of, as you say, killing me. It may be necessary for me to offer you the first chance."

"Which would not be accepted. I should not cross swords with you. You will remember that your flight with the lady in question was brought to the ears of the King himself-in spite of the English King's indifference-by our ambassador to England,

on the complaint of her father. Also, that his Majesty demanded an explanation from me for the outrage that you, an accredited member of the suite sent over by him, had committed, and that it was only on being able to state that you had married the lady that you were allowed to retain your position with the Marshal. But I have since found that that statement, made on your authority, was a lie. You have not married the lady."

"*Mon Dieu!*" the other exclaimed, roused now. "No, I have not-though there is a strange explanation of-"

"Stop. I will hear no explanation. You deceived me once, and you will doubtless deceive me again. But, as I have said, you must leave this camp."

"I will not leave it. Bah! It would be ruin, ignominy. What! leave the army with another engagement at hand, and-and-which is greater ignominy if possible, run away from this man who has sought me out. Sought me! Sought me the best master of fence in all Turenne's forces. It is impossible."

"Still, it must be done. Otherwise I shall inform the King of the falsehood told him. Then-if he chooses to pardon you-I cannot help it, and Andrew Vause may kill you."

"Andrew Vause!" the other exclaimed. "Andrew Vause! Of whom are you speaking? That is not the man to whom she was affianced. His name was Philip."

"And he is his brother."

"Ha! So! I hope he is not so much of a weakling as report would have that brother to be, otherwise he will scarce enjoy a

quarter of an hour with me, nor-

"I tell you he is no weakling, and he has come here with the determination of killing you-

"Which would grieve you-my cousin, and his friend?"

"It would not grieve me in the least. But, as I say, it would lead to scandal, and might prevent my search for the unhappy lady whom you have vilely deceived. Also-

"Your search for the unhappy lady, as you term her-your search! You intend that? Monsieur le Marquis, what do you mean by this intrusion in my affairs? Answer me!" And now he had risen from his chair and stood before his young cousin, his eyes fixed piercingly on the boy's face. "Quick. Answer."

"I mean that the instant this campaign is over, be it long or short-and if I live through it-I intend to find the woman you have betrayed, inveigled from her own country to ours, and to return her to her father, if he will take her back. And in my search for her I intend to procure, if possible, the services of Captain Vause."

"So. You intend to do that-if you live. Valentin Debrasques, you will not live. Therefore, be warned in time. If Montecuculi's or Caprara's soldiers do not put an end to your viperish young career-why, as you say-the campaign will be over, and then you will have to make your account with me. Now," he continued, and as he spoke he threw open the door and pointed to it, "go. And, remember, when the campaign is over, I shall demand an interview with you."

"I will remember," Debrasques said, also rising now from his chair. "Fear not. But, previously, there are other things which you had best not forget. First, that the King will be informed of the lie about your marriage with the lady, and, next-

"Yes? Next?"

"That Montecuculi's or Caprara's soldiers may be as like to put an end to your career as to mine, and, even if they do not, why, then-

"Yes?" De Bois-Vallée said again interrogatively. "Yes? And then?"

"Why, then-if you are not previously sent away in disgrace from Turenne's service-Andrew Vause will kill you himself."

"Go!" the Vicomte said once more, and pointing still with his finger to the door, while Debrasques, watching it, thought it shook somewhat now. "Go, before it is too late."

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST MEETING

A day or two after the interview between Debrasques and his cousin, Andrew Vause sat in his tent, for the four English-speaking regiments-namely, those under Churchill and Colonel Littleton, who commanded the Duke of Monmouth's Foot, and those commanded respectively by Hamilton and Lord Douglas-were not cantoned in the villages which had escaped destruction by the flames, but were under canvas around Ladenburg and Gross-Saxen. Indeed, so furious were the members of the auxiliary forces, which Charles had sent to help his brother monarch, at the manner in which scores of their comrades had been treated by the people of the Palatinate in their mad revenge, that Turenne wisely billeted them where there was no more property to be destroyed. Already this wanton destruction had led to much outcry against the Marshal, and also to a challenge to him to fight a duel from Charles Louis, the Elector-Palatine; and, hampered and annoyed as he was by shortness of men and continued reproaches from Louvois, the Minister of War in Paris, he was desirous now that, outside actual warfare with the Imperialists, there should be no more horrors perpetrated than necessary.

Before Andrew, on a common wooden table at which he

sat, there lay a sheet of paper on which he had written at the bottom, with as great legibility as possible, his name in large clear characters, and this paper he was now perusing for the second or third time ere folding it and affixing a seal thereto.

"Yes," he murmured to himself. "Yes; it should suffice. The disguise is flimsy, 'tis true, but the name tells all. If he is not a cur 'twill do very well," and again he read it over. It ran as follows: -

"To Monsieur le Vicomte de Bois-Vallée, of the
bodyguard of the Vicomte de Turenne, Marshal-General of
the King's Armies.

"Sir, - Your fame as a swordsman is so widespread that it has reached my ears and inspired me with a desire to have evidence thereof, being myself considered no mean wielder of the blade. As brother officers in the same army may I, therefore, humbly beg that you will give me proof of your cleverness. The weapon I usually carry is in length forty inches, but in Paris, ere joining my present regiment, I purchased two others, one being of the length in blade of thirty-six inches, and the other of thirty-eight. As I do not doubt that, in your courtesy, you will not refuse this favour to a brother swordsman, I will await you, sir, at either sunrise or sunset at any retired spot you may honour me by naming, and will attend either alone or with a second as you may direct. And I have the honour to subscribe myself, Monsieur le Vicomte,

"Your most humble servitor,

"Andrew Vause,

"Attached as volunteer to the Royal English Regiment, commanded by Colonel John Churchill."

Then, having sent the document off by what he knew was a sure hand, Andrew sat down and waited for the reply of De Bois-Vallée.

But several days passed, yet none came, and, at last, Andrew growing impatient (for now it was rumoured that there must be another battle ere long, and he knew that the chance of war might rob him of his vengeance by removing him or the Vicomte from each other's path), he set about inditing another epistle. This time it was more laconic.

"Sir," he now wrote, "owing doubtless to the attention demanded from you by your duty, I have received no answer to my request for a trial of our skill at swordplay. With much respect I still await that answer," and he concluded his letter with the usual ceremonial flourishes.

Yet still some days passed by and no answer came, so that Andrew thought he would once more be forced to take up his quill, while all the time his great hand was itching to grasp one of the weapons on which his eyes lovingly reposed as they stood in a bundle in a corner of the room. Then, one night, as he returned to his tent after going the rounds, and after also stopping to drink a glass or so of ratafia with some of his brother officers, many of whom were old comrades, he found lying on his table a letter—a letter with a great seal upon it, on which was a vicomte's coronet and a coat-of-arms, and which he tore open eagerly.

Yet it was unsatisfactory, as he saw in a moment, though such was not the description that the soldier applied to the writer of the document while he perused it, but rather such words as "Cur" and "Craven."

The communication was prefaced and concluded as Andrew's own challenges had been, with all necessary politeness and ceremony, yet it simply conveyed to him the fact that De Bois-Vallée refused to meet him.

"As you are aware," it said, "duelling is forbidden to officers on active service; even the Marshal himself was forced to refuse to meet the Elector-Palatine. Nor, since I cannot think, sir, that it is simply a trial of skill which you desire, can I consent to meet you at this present moment. Later on I hope I may be accorded that honour."

Then, hot with passion, Andrew, before seeking his bed from which his duties would necessitate his rising ere the dawn, sat down and scratched off one more letter.

"Sir," he wrote, "if you do not meet me within forty-eight hours, I will affront you so publicly before some of your own officers that you shall be forced to draw on the instant. And, if that suffice not, I will there and then bodily chastise you, while, for justification, I will publicly proclaim your conduct in England to my late brother, Philip Vause, and the lady to whom he was betrothed. To-morrow night I shall attend at seven o'clock in the glade a few minutes' walk west of the burnt church, and also on the following night. Each night for an hour. I counsel you to

come."

"Wait," he said in the morning to the soldier-servant who attended on him, and who was about to proceed to Turenne's quarters with the letter half an hour after daybreak, "wait for an answer by word of mouth. Yes or No. Those who take the letter from your hand can bring you back the reply. Remember, by word of mouth."

Then he went forth to a hard day's duty with the regiment, which was under orders to be ready at any moment to strike its tents and march in all probability towards the defile of Rhinzabern, and did not return again until the evening.

By that time he knew that the opportunity for the Vicomte to avoid him no longer existed; the order had gone forth that day that the remainder of the army would possibly not move till the following week. De Bois-Vallée could not, therefore, escape thus, as Andrew had feared he would be able to do if the rout had been set for that night.

"He is mine. Mine," he said to himself as he strode to his tent. "Mine if only I have pricked him into consent. He cannot avoid me now. I will have him somehow, even though he should again refuse to meet me."

For that De Bois-Vallée could emerge triumphant from this "trial of skill" he never believed; nay, gave no thought to. *Maître d'armes* or not, as he might be, Andrew Vause felt sure that, once point to point with him, he would avenge his brother.

His man met him at the door, and, in answer to the hasty

question, "Well, what reply?" said, "the reply, sir, is 'Yes. To-night,'" and, as a glow of satisfaction rose to his master's bosom, the servant continued, "Also, there is this for you, sir," and produced a letter with, again, the great seal on it.

"You force this upon me," it ran, "therefore the outcome is on your own head. I choose swords of the length of thirty-eight inches. I shall come alone, as I do not desire to be punished for your death."

Andrew had smiled but little since he saw Philip's coffin lowered into the grave by the side of his mother and father, nor had he made many of the jokes he loved since that day, yet he smiled now so pleasantly that his servant, who strongly suspected a duel to be lurking beneath all this fetching and carrying of letters and messages, began to think he was mistaken, and went to his night quarters quite cheerfully. Yet, ere he departed, he asked his master if he desired to be awakened as usual half an hour before daybreak—the question being put as much with a desire to see if it would be answered with any shadow of doubt attached to it, as to know his duty.

"Ay," said Andrew quietly, "or maybe a little earlier. And have all my necessaries ready for our departure. We shall most like strike tent to-morrow."

After which reply the man went away, thinking what a fool he had been to suppose that people would be killing each other when there was an enemy of twice their own force close at hand to do it for them.

Left alone, Andrew picked out the rapier—a deep cup-hilted one—whose size De Bois-Vallée had suggested, and tested it severely against the floor and wall, bending it against each until it must have broken had it not been of the finest-tempered steel; also he examined carefully its hilt and quillon to see that all was secure and firm.

"I must give my friend no chance," he thought; "a broken blade, a loosened hilt, and—poof! — good-night to Andrew Vause!"

So, satisfied that all was well with the weapon, he rubbed it carefully on his sleeve, and, returning it to its black leather scabbard, went forth with it behind his back.

The glade near the burnt church which some of Hamilton's men had fired a week ago—wherefore two were now hanging by Turenne's orders to a yew tree outside it—was very peaceful in the glow of the summer sunset, and here, at least, except for the view of the ruined church through the trees that bordered the grassy space, there were no signs of the devastation of the land. Above, the rooks were cawing as though no such thing as powder and ball had ever disturbed them, and now and again a rabbit or two, which had escaped the general pillage and search for food, ran away at the sound of Andrew's footsteps on the soft springy turf, whisking the underwhite of their tails before his eyes.

"A better spot for love-making than for killing," he thought to himself; "for an arm to fold itself around a maiden's waist, than to press down a scoundrel's guard—ah! here comes the scoundrel

himself," and he took off his hat with great courtesy to the Vicomte de Bois-Vallée, who strode towards him.

The latter seemed, however, to have exhausted his politeness in the letters he had written, and, without deigning any reply to the other's salutation, instantly divested himself of his coat, while he unlooped the sheath from which he had already drawn his weapon, and threw it down on top of the garment. Yet, as he did so, he gave an astonished glance at the form of the man before him, and at his great sinewy limbs. Perhaps he had heard from the woman who had betrayed Philip how slight and delicate a man he was, and wondered that this other, who was of the same flesh and blood, should be so strong and powerful!

"I have but one question to ask," he said, as he stood now before Andrew, "a usual one in our country when one honours a stranger by crossing swords with him. You are, I presume, of gentle blood?"

"I am Philip Vause's brother. And he was of sufficiently gentle blood for you to steal his future wife from him like a thief."

"Enough," the Vicomte said, while his face became suffused. "Enough. I am at your service."

"And," continued Andrew, "had we been of the commonest clay our country owns, I should still carry out my determination of punishing such a thief."

Without another word their swords crossed, and as they did so Andrew was surprised at the reckless fury of the man before him. Was this the *maître d'armes*, the renowned *escrimeur*; this

man who fought more like a hot-headed boy than a practical swordsman, cool and wary! Yet, Andrew reflected-as he parried thrust after thrust with his wrist of steel, and waited his turn, which would come soon if the Vicomte spent himself thus-doubtless the epithet of "thief" had roused him-precisely as he had meant that it should do.

Gradually, too, he edged his opponent round so that the rays of the setting sun, which had been in his own eyes when the conflict began, would, in another moment, be in those of his adversary; but this advantage he could not obtain altogether, since the Frenchman perceived his intention in an instant and endeavoured to drive Andrew back to his original position. As well might he, however, have endeavoured to drive back a rock from the earth it was set in! Andrew's feet were firm upon the turf, and, henceforth, they fought with the sun's rays athwart them, and not favouring one more than the other.

Watching De Bois-Vallée with an eye like a hawk's and parrying thrust after thrust, he saw upon the other's forehead the moisture coming and the drops gathering, and then, for the first time, he let his own weapon shoot out, after thrusting the Vicomte's last lunge away from him with another twist of his wrist. He missed his mark, it was true, since the sword's point tore but an inch out of the cambric of the other's shirt above his left shoulder, but the rip of the material under his ear told De Bois-Vallée the danger he was in. The cool Englishman before him was deadly, he recognized, otherwise how had the point

reached to where it did? He had calculated the other could not come within half a foot of him.

"I will take it a little lower next time, monsieur," Andrew said quietly. "It is a charming pass when properly made!"

But at his words the furious thrusts of his opponent ceased. The Vicomte was a different man. Softly his blade now glided up and down the other's, and Andrew knew that he was going to experience a real taste of his antagonist's skill-he would learn a new pass in a moment.

And in a moment he did learn it. High up near his own hilt crept the other's sword, then he disengaged, feinted once, and-a second later-his rapier had slit the Englishman's waistcoat outside his left ribs, had passed within four inches of his heart. But, since it was four inches, it might as well have been a mile!

"Ha!" said Andrew as the other recovered himself, and, jumping back out of reach, glared at him, "a pretty *botte*. And worth knowing-as I know it now. But, monsieur, you should have been sure of it, or made no attempt. It will serve you no more." And with great suavety he said, "Monsieur is perhaps ready to recommence?"

"He is implacable," De Bois-Vallée thought to himself. "Curse him, he knows as much as I!" and he felt creeping over him a horrible dread. He began to fear he had fought his last duel-that in a few moments more he would be stretched gasping on the grass with his life ebbing away. Yet he nerved himself-such qualms and apprehensions as these, he knew, were fatal-and again their

swords crossed.

There was no recklessness now in either combatant, no thrust made heedlessly or thrown away; instead a devilish, cruel determination in each man to strike firm and sure when next he struck at all, through heart or lung. Their weapons clashed no longer, but hissed and scraped softly against each other; once the Frenchman tried his *botte* again, failing utterly this time, and once Andrew's blade darted forth like an adder's tongue, failing in its turn, but ripping an inch of flesh from his opponent's side.

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