DUMAS ALEXANDRE

THE COUNTESS OF CHARNY; OR, THE EXECUTION OF KING LOUIS XVI

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Содержание

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CHAPTER I.
THE NEW MEN AT THE WHEEL

It was on the first of October, 1791, that the new Legislative Assembly was to be inaugurated over France.

King Louis XVI., captured with Queen Marie Antoinette and the royal family, while attempting to escape from the kingdom and join his brothers and the other princes abroad, was held in a kind of detention, like imprisonment without hard labor, in the Tuileries Palace in Paris.

His fate hung on the members of the new House of Representatives. Let us hasten to see what they were.

The Congress was composed of seven hundred and forty-five members: four hundred lawyers of one kind or another; some seventy literary men; seventy priests who had taken the oath to abide by the Constitution, not yet framed, but to which the king had subscribed on the sketch. The remaining two hundred odd

were landholders, farming their own estates or hiring them out to others.

Among these was François Billet, a robust peasant of forty-five, distinguished by the people of Paris and France as a hero, from having been mainly instrumental in the taking of the Bastile, regarded as the embodiment of the ancient tyranny, now almost leveled with the dust.

Billet had suffered two wrongs at the hands of the king's men and the nobles, which he had sworn to avenge as well on the classes as on the individuals.

His farm-house had been pillaged by Paris policemen acting under a blank warrant signed by the king and issued at the request of Andrea de Taverney, Countess of Charny, the queen's favorite, as her husband the count was reckoned, too. She had a spite against Billet's friend, Dr. Honore Gilbert, a noted patriot and politician. In his youth, this afterward distinguished physician had taken advantage of her senses being steeped in a mesmeric swoon, to lower her pride. Thanks to this trance and from his overruling love, he was the progenitor of her son, Sebastian Emile Gilbert; but with all the pride of this paternity, he was haunted by unceasing remorse. Andrea could not forgive this crime, all the more as it was a thorn in her side since her marriage.

It was a marriage enforced on her, as the Count of Charny had been caught by the king on his knees to the queen; and to prevent the stupid monarch being convinced by this scene that there was truth in the tattle at court that Count Charny was Marie

Antoinette's paramour, she had explained that he merely was suing for the hand of her friend Andrea. The king's consent given, this marriage took place, but for six years the couple dwelt apart; not that mutual love did not prevail between them, but neither was aware of the affection each had inspired in the other at first sight.

The new countess thought that Charny's affection for the queen was a guilty and durable one; while he, believing his wife, by compulsion, a saint on earth, dared not presume on the position which fate and devotion to their sovereign had imposed on them both.

This devotion was confirmed on the count's part, cemented by blood; for his two brothers, Valence and Isidore, had lost their lives in defending the king and queen from the revolutionists.

Andrea had a brother, Philip, who also loved the queen, but he had been offended by her amour with Charny; and, being touched by an American republican fever while fighting with Lafayette for the liberation of the thirteen colonies, he had quitted the court of France.

On his way he had wounded Gilbert, whom he learned to be his sister's wronger, as well as having stolen away her infant son; but although the wound would have been mortal under other treatment, it had been healed by the wondrous medicaments of Joseph Balsamo, *alias* Count Cagliostro, the celebrated head of the Invisibles, a branch of the Orient Freemasons, dedicated to overthrow the monarchy and set up a republic, after the United

States model, in France, if not in Europe.

Gilbert and Cagliostro were therefore fast friends, to say nothing of the latter's regret that he should have set temptation in the young man's way; it was he who had plunged Andrea into the magnetic slumber from which she had awakened a maid no longer.

But some recompense had come to the proud lady, after the six years' wedded life to the very man she adored, though fate and misunderstanding had estranged them. On learning what a martyr she had been through the unconscious motherhood, Count George had more than forgiven her – he worshiped her; and in their country seat at Boursonnes, eighteen miles from Paris, he was forgetting, in her lovely arms the demands of his queen, his king, and his caste, to use his influence in the political arena.

This silence on his part led to the candidature of Farmer Billet being unimpeded.

Besides, Charny would hardly have moved in opposition to the latter, as one cause of the enmity of the peasant was his daughter's ruin by Viscount Isidore Charny. The death of the latter, not being by Billet's hand, had not appeased the grudge. He was a stern, unrelenting man; and just as he would not forgive his daughter Catherine for her dishonor, or even look upon her son, he stood out uncompromisingly against the nobles and the priests.

Charny had stolen his daughter; the clergy, in the person of

his parish priest, Father Fortier, had refused burial to his wife.

On her grave he had vowed eternal hostility to the nobles and the clericals.

The farmers had great power at election time, as they employed ten, twenty, or thirty hands; and though the suffrage was divided into two classes at the period, the result depended on the rural vote.

As each man quitted Billet at the grave, he shook him by the hand, saying:

"It is a sure thing, brother."

Billet had gone home to his lonely farm, easy on this score; for the first time he saw a plain way of returning the noble class and royalty all the harm they had done him. He felt, but did not reason, and his thirst for vengeance was as blind as the blows he had received.

His daughter had come home to nurse her mother, and receive at the last gasp her blessing and for her son, born in shame; but Billet had said never a word to her; none could tell if he were aware of her flitting through the farm. Since a year he had not uttered her name, and it was the same as if she had never existed.

Her only friend was Ange Pitou, a poor peasant lad whom Billet had harbored when he was driven from home by his Aunt Angelique.

As Catherine was really the ruler of the roast on the farm, it was but natural that Pitou should offer her some part of the gratitude Billet had earned. This excellent feeling expanded into

love; but there was little chance for the peasant when the girl had been captivated by the elegant young lord, although the elevation common during revolution had exalted Ange into a captaincy of the National Guards.

But Pitou had never swerved in his love for the deluded girl. He had a heart of gold; he was deeply sorry that Catherine had not loved him, but on comparing himself with young Charny, he acknowledged that she must prefer him. He envied Isidore, but he bore Catherine no ill-will; quite otherwise, he still loved her with profound and entire devotion.

To say this dedication was completely exempt from anguish, is going too far; but the pangs which made Pitou's heart ache at each new token of Catherine's love for her dead lover, showed his ineffable goodness.

All his feeling for Catherine when Isidore was slain at Varennes, where Billet arrested the king in his flight, was of utter pity. Quite contrary to Billet, he did justice to the young noble in the way of grace, generosity, and kindness, though he was his rival without knowing it. Like Catherine, he knew that the barriers of caste were insurmountable, and that the viscount could not have made his sweetheart his wife.

The consequence was that Pitou perhaps more loved the widow in her sorrow than when she was the coquettish girl, but it came to pass that he almost loved the little orphan boy like his own.

Let none be astonished, therefore, that after taking leave of

Billet like the others, Ange went toward Haramont instead of Billet's farm, which might also be his home.

But he had lodgings at Haramont village, where he was born, and he was chief of the National Guards there.

They were so accustomed to his sudden departures and unexpected returns, that nobody was worried at them. When he went away, they said to one another: "He has gone to town to confer with General Lafayette," for the French lieutenant of General Washington was the friend, here as there, of Dr. Gilbert, who was their fellow-peasants' patron, and had furnished the funds to equip the Haramont company of volunteers.

On their commander's return they asked news of the capital; and as he could give the freshest and truest, thanks to Dr. Gilbert, who was an honorary physician to the king as well as friend of Cagliostro – in other words, the communicator between the two Leyden jars of the revolution – Pitou's predictions were sure to be realized in a few days, so that all continued to show him blind trust, as well as military captain as political prophet.

On his part, Gilbert knew all that was good and self-sacrificing in the peasant; he felt that he was a man to whom he might at the scratch intrust his life or Sebastian's – a treasure or a commission, anything confided to strength and loyalty. Every time Pitou came to Paris, the doctor would ask him if he stood in need of anything, without the young man coloring up; and while he would always say, "Nothing, thank you, Doctor Gilbert," this did not prevent the physician giving him some money, which

Pitou ingulfed in his pocket.

A few gold pieces, with what he picked up in the game shot or trapped in the Duke of Orleans' woods, were a fortune; so, rarely did he find himself at the end of his resources when he met the doctor and had his supply renewed.

Knowing, then, how friendly Pitou was with Catherine and her baby, it will be understood that he hastily separated from Billet, to know how his cast-off daughter was getting on.

His road to Haramont took him past a hut in the woods where lived a veteran of the wars, who, on a pension and the privilege of killing a hare or a rabbit each day, lived a happy hermit's life, remote from man. Father Clovis, as this old soldier was called, was a great friend of Pitou. He had taught the boy to go gunning, and also the military drill by which he had trained the Haramont Guards to be the envy of the county. When Catherine was banished from her father's, after Billet had tried to shoot Isidore, his hut sheltered her till after the birth of her son. On her applying once more for the like hospitality, he had not hesitated; and when Pitou came along, she was sitting on the bed, with tears on her cheek at the revival of sad memories, and her boy in her arms.

On seeing the new-comer, Catherine set down the child and offered her forehead for Pitou's kiss; he gladly took her two hands, kissed her, and the child was sheltered by the arch formed with his stooping figure. Dropping on his knees to her and kissing the baby's little hands, he exclaimed:

"Never mind, I am rich; Master Isidore shall never come to want."

Pitou had twenty-five gold louis, which he reckoned to make him rich. Keen of wit and kind of heart, Catherine appreciated all that is good.

"Thank you, Captain Pitou," she said; "I believe you, and I am happy in so believing, for you are my only friend, and if you were to cast me off, we should stand alone in the world; but you never will, will you?"

"Oh, don't talk like that," cried Pitou, sobbing; "you will make me pour out all the tears in my body."

"I was wrong; excuse me," she said.

"No, no, you are right; I am a fool to blubber."

"Captain Pitou," said Catherine, "I should like an airing. Give me your arm for a stroll under the trees. I fancy it will do me good."

"I feel as if I were smothering myself," added Pitou.

The child had no need of air, nothing but sleep; so he was laid abed, and Catherine walked out with Pitou.

Five minutes after they were in the natural temple, under the huge trees.

Without being a philosopher on a level with Voltaire or Rousseau, Pitou understood that he and Catherine were atoms carried on by the whirlwind. But these atoms had their joy and grief just like the other atoms called king, queen, nobles; the mill of God, held by fatality, ground crowns and thrones to dust at

the same time, and crushed Catherine's happiness no less harshly than if she wore a diadem.

Two years and a half before, Pitou was a poor peasant lad, hunted from home by his Aunt Angelique, received by Billet, feasted by Catherine, and "cut out" by Isidore.

At present, Ange Pitou was a power; he wore a sword by his side and epaulets on his shoulders; he was called a captain, and he was protecting the widow and son of the slain Viscount Isidore.

Relatively to Pitou the expression was exact of Danton, who, when asked why he was making the revolution, replied: "To put on high what was undermost, and send the highest below all."

But though these ideas danced in his head, he was not the one to profit by them, and the good and modest fellow went on his knees to beg Catherine to let him shield her and the boy.

Like all suffering hearts, Catherine had a finer appreciation in grief than in joy. Pitou, who was in her happy days a lad of no consequence, became the holy creature he really was; in other words, a man of goodness, candor, and devotion. The result was that, unfortunate and in want of a friend, she understood that Pitou was just the friend she wished; and so, always received by Catherine with one hand held out to him, and a witching smile, Pitou began to lead a life of bliss of which he never had had the idea even in dreams of paradise.

During this time, Billet, still mute as regarded his daughter, pursued his idea of being nominated for the House while getting in his harvest. Only one man could have beaten him, if he had the

same ambition; but, entirely absorbed in his love and happiness, the Count of Charny, the world forgetting, believed himself forgotten by the world. He did not think of the matter, enjoying his unexpected felicity.

Hence, nothing opposed Billet's election in Villers Cotterets district, and he was elected by an immense majority.

As soon as chosen, he began to turn everything into money; it had been a good year. He set aside his landlord's share, reserved his own, put aside the grain for sowing, and the fodder for his live stock, and the cash to keep the work-folks going, and one morning sent for Pitou.

Now and then Pitou paid him a visit. Billet always welcomed him with open hand, made him take meals, if anything was on the board, or wine or cider, if it was the right time for drinks. But never had Billet sent for Pitou. Hence, it was not without disquiet that the young man proceeded to the farm.

Billet was always grave; nobody could say that he had seen a smile pass over his lips since his daughter had left the farm. This time he was graver than usual.

Still he held out his hand in the old manner to Pitou, shook his with more vigor than usual, and kept it in his, while the other looked at him with wonder.

"Pitou, you are an honest fellow," said the farmer.

"Faith, I believe I am," replied Pitou.

"I am sure of it."

"You are very good, Master Billet."

"It follows that, as I am going away, I shall leave you at the head of my farm."

"Impossible! There are a lot of petty matters for which a woman's eye is indispensable."

"I know it," replied Billet; "you can select the woman to share the superintendence with you. I shall not ask her name; I don't want to know it; and when I come down to the farm, I shall notify you a week ahead, so she will have time to get out of the way if she ought not to see me or I see her."

"Very well, Master Billet," said the new steward.

"Now, in the granary is the grain for sowing; also the hay and other fodder for the cattle, and in this drawer you see the cash to pay the hands." He opened a drawer full of hard money.

"Stop a bit, master. How much is in this drawer?"

"I do not know," rejoined Billet, locking the drawer and giving the key to Pitou, with the words; "When you want more, ask for it."

Pitou felt all the trust in this speech and put out his hand to grasp the other's, but was checked by his humility.

"Nonsense," said Billet; "why should not honest men grasp hands?"

"If you should want me in town?"

"Rest easy; I shall not forget you. It is two o'clock; I shall start for Paris at five. At six, you might be here with the woman you choose to second you."

"Right; but then, there is no time to lose," said Pitou. "I hope

we shall soon meet again, dear Master Billet."

Billet watched him hurrying away as long as he could see him, and when he disappeared, he said: "Now, why did not Catherine fall in love with an honest chap like that, rather than one of those noble vermin who leaves her a mother without being a wife, and a widow without her being wed."

It is needless to say that Billet got upon the Villers Cotterets stage to ride to Paris at five, and that at six Catherine and little Isidore re-entered the farm.

Billet found himself among young men in the House, not merely representatives, but fighters; for it was felt that they had to wrestle with the unknown.

They were armed against two enemies, the clergy and the nobility. If these resisted, the orders were for them to be overcome.

The king was pitied, and the members were left free to treat him as occasion dictated. It was hoped that he might escape the threefold power of the queen, the clergy, and the aristocracy; if they upheld him, they would all be broken to pieces with him. They moved that the title of majesty should be suppressed.

"What shall we call the executive power, then?" asked a voice.

"Call him 'the King of the French,'" shouted Billet. "It is a pretty title enough for Capet to be satisfied with."

Moreover, instead of a throne, the King of the French had to content himself with a plain arm-chair, and that was placed on the left of the speaker's, so that the monarch should be

subordinated.

In the absence of the king, the Constitution was sworn to by the sad, cold House, all aware that the impotent laws would not endure a year.

As these motions were equivalent to saying, "there is no longer a king." Money, as usual, took fright; down went the stocks dreadfully, and the bankers took alarm.

There was a revulsion in favor of the king, and his speech in the House was so applauded that he went to the theater that evening in high glee. That night he wrote to the powers of Europe that he had subscribed to the Constitution.

So far, the House had been tolerant, mild to the refractory priests, and paying pensions to the princes and nobles who had fled abroad.

We shall see how the nobles recompensed this mildness.

When they were debating on paying the old and infirm priests, though they might be opposed to the Reformation, news came from Avignon of a massacre of revolutionists by the religious fanatics, and a bloody reprisal of the other party.

As for the runaway nobles, still drawing revenue from their country, this is what they were doing.

They reconciled Austria with Prussia, making friends of two enemies. They induced Russia to forbid the French embassador going about the St. Petersburg streets, and sent a minister to the refugees at Coblentz. They made Berne punish a town for singing the "It shall go on." They led the kings to act roughly; Russia and

Sweden sent back with unbroken seals Louis XVI.'s dispatches announcing his adhesion to the Constitution.

Spain refused to receive it, and a French revolutionist would have been burned by the Inquisition only for his committing suicide.

Venice threw on St. Mark's Place the corpse of a man strangled in the night by the Council of Ten, with the plain inscription: "This was a Freemason."

The Emperor and the King of Prussia did answer, but it was by a threat: "We trust we shall not have to take precautions against the repetition of events promising such sad auguries."

Hence there was a religious war in La Vendee and in the south, with prospective war abroad.

At present the intention of the crowned heads was to stifle the revolution rather than cut its throat.

The defiance of aristocratic Europe was accepted, and instead of waiting for the attack, the orator of the House cried for France to begin the movement.

The absentee princes were summoned home on penalty of losing all rights to the succession; the nobles' property was seized, unless they took the oath of allegiance to the country. The priests were granted a week to take the oath, or to be imprisoned, and no churches could be used for worship unless by the sworn clergy.

Lafayette's party wished the king to oppose his veto to these acts, but the queen so hated Lafayette that she induced the Court party to support Petion instead of the general for the post of

mayor of Paris. Strange blindness, in favor of Petion, her rude jailer, who had brought her back from the flight to Varennes.

On the nineteenth of December the king vetoed the bill against the priests.

That night, at the Jacobin Club, the debate was hot. Virchaux, a Swiss, offered the society a sword for the first general who should vanquish the enemies of freedom. Isnard, the wrath of the House, a southerner, drew the sword, and leaped up into the rostrum, crying:

"Behold the sword of the exterminating angel! It will be victorious! France will give a loud call, and all the people will respond; the earth will then be covered with warriors, and the foes of liberty will be wiped out from the list of men!"

Ezekiel could not have spoken better. This drawn sword was not to be sheathed, for war broke out within and without. The Switzer's sword was first to smite the King of France, the foreign sovereigns afterward.

CHAPTER II.
GILBERT'S CANDIDATE

Dr. Gilbert had not seen the queen for six months, since he had let her know that he was informed by Cagliostro that she was deceiving him.

He was therefore astonished to see the king's valet enter his room one morning. He thought the king was sick and had sent for him, but the messenger reassured him. He was wanted in the palace, whither he hastened to go.

He was profoundly attached to the king; he pitied Marie Antoinette more as a woman than a queen. It was profound pity, for she inspired neither love nor devotion.

The lady waiting to greet Gilbert was the Princess Elizabeth. Neither king nor queen, after his showing them he saw they were playing him false, had dared to send directly to him; they put Lady Elizabeth forward.

Her first words proved to the doctor that he was not mistaken in his surmise.

"Doctor Gilbert," said she, "I do not know whether others have forgotten the tokens of interest you showed my brother on our return from Versailles, and those you showed my sister on our return from Varennes, but I remember."

"Madame," returned Gilbert, bowing, "God, in His wisdom,

hath decided that you should have all the merits, memory included – a scarce virtue in our days, and particularly so among royal personages."

"I hope you are not referring to my brother, who often speaks of you, and praises your experience."

"As a medical adviser," remarked Gilbert, smiling.

"Yes; but he thinks you can be a physician to the realm as well as to the ruler."

"Very kind of the king. For which case is he calling me in at present?"

"It is not the king who calls you, sir, but I," responded the lady, blushing; for her chaste heart knew not how to lie.

"You? Your health worries me the least; your pallor arises from fatigue and disquiet, not from bad health."

"You are right; I am not trembling for myself, but my brother, who makes me fret."

"So he does me, madame."

"Oh, our uneasiness does not probably spring from the same cause, as I am concerned about his health. I do not mean that he is unwell, but he is downcast and disheartened. Some ten days ago – I am counting the days now – he ceased speaking, except to me, and in his favorite pastime of backgammon he only utters the necessary terms of the game."

"It is eleven days since he went to the House to present his veto. Why was he not mute that day instead of the next?"

"Is it your opinion that he should have sanctioned that impious

decree?" demanded the princess, quickly.

"My opinion is, that to put the king in front of the priests in the coming tide, the rising storm, is to have priests and king broken by the same wave."

"What would you do in my poor brother's place, doctor?"

"A party is growing, like those genii of the Arabian Nights, which becomes a hundred cubits high an hour after release from the imprisoning bottle."

"You allude to the Jacobins?"

Gilbert shook his head.

"No; I mean the Girondists, who wish for war, a national desire."

"But war with whom? With the emperor, our brother? The King of Spain, our nephew? Our enemies, Doctor Gilbert, are at home, and not outside of France, in proof of which – " She hesitated, but he besought her to speak.

"I really do not know that I can tell you, though it is the reason of my asking you here."

"You may speak freely to one who is devoted and ready to give his life to the king."

"Do you believe there is any counterbane?" she inquired.

"Universal?" queried Gilbert, smiling. "No, madame; each venomous substance has its antidote, though they are of little avail generally."

"What a pity!"

"There are two kinds of poisons, mineral and vegetable – of

what sort would you speak?"

"Doctor, I am going to tell you a great secret. One of our cooks, who left the royal kitchen to set up a bakery of his own, has returned to our service, with the intention of murdering the king. This red-hot Jacobin has been heard crying that France would be relieved if the king were put out of the way."

"In general, men fit for such a crime do not go about bragging beforehand. But I suppose you take precautions?"

"Yes; it is settled that the king shall live on roast meat, with a trusty hand to supply the bread and wine. As the king is fond of pastry, Madame Campan orders what he likes, as though for herself. We are warned especially against powdered sugar."

"In which arsenic might be mixed unnoticed?"

"Exactly. It was the queen's habit to use it for her lemonade, but we have entirely given up the use of it. The king, the queen, and I take meals together, ringing for what we want. Madame Campan brings us what we like, secretly, and hides it under the table; we pretend to eat the usual things while the servants are in the room. This is how we live, sir; and yet the queen and I tremble every instant lest the king should turn pale and cry out he was in pain."

"Let me say at once, madame," returned the doctor, "that I do not believe in these threats of poisoning; but in any event, I am under his majesty's orders. What does the king desire? That I should have lodgings in the palace? I will stay here in such a way as to be at hand until the fears are over."

"Oh, my brother is not afraid!" the princess hastened to say.

"I did not mean that. Until your fears are over. I have some practice in poisonings and their remedies. I am ready to baffle them in whatever shape they are presented; but allow me to say, madame, that all fears for the king might be removed if he were willing."

"Oh, what must be done for that?" intervened a voice, not the Lady Elizabeth's, and which, by its emphatic and ringing tone, made Gilbert turn.

It was the queen, and he bowed.

"Has the queen doubted the sincerity of my offers?"

"Oh, sir, so many heads and hearts have turned in this tempestuous wind, that one knows not whom to trust."

"Which is why your majesty receives from the Feuillants Club a Premier shaped by the Baroness de Stael?"

"You know that?" cried the royal lady, starting.

"I know your majesty is pledged to take Count Louis de Narbonne."

"And, of course, you blame me?"

"No; it is a trial like others. When the king shall have tried all, he may finish by the one with whom he should have commenced."

"You know Madame de Stael? What do you think of her?"

"Physically, she is not altogether attractive."

The queen smiled; as a woman, she was not sorry to hear another woman decried who just then was widely talked about.

"But her talent, her parts, her merits?"

"She is good and generous, madame; none of her enemies would remain so after a quarter of an hour's conversation."

"I speak of her genius, sir; politics are not managed by the heart."

"Madame, the heart spoils nothing, not even in politics; but let us not use the word genius rashly. Madame de Stael has great and immense talent, but it does not rise to genius; she is as iron to the steel of her master, Rousseau. As a politician, she is given more heed than she deserves. Her drawing-room is the meeting-place of the English party. Coming of the middle class as she does, and that the money-worshiping middle class, she has the weakness of loving a lord; she admires the English from thinking that they are an aristocratic people. Being ignorant of the history of England, and the mechanism of its government, she takes for the descendants of the Norman Conquerors the baronets created yesterday. With old material, other people make a new stock; with the new, England often makes the old."

"Do you see in this why Baroness de Stael proposes De Narbonne to us?"

"Hem! This time, madame, two likings are combined: that for the aristocracy and the aristocrat."

"Do you imagine that she loves Louis de Narbonne on account of his descent?"

(Louis de Narbonne was supposed to be an incestuous son of King Louis XV.)

"It is not on account of any ability, I reckon?"

"But nobody is less well-born than Louis de Narbonne; his father is not even known."

"Only because one dares not look at the sun."

"So you do not believe that De Narbonne is the outcome of the Swedish Embassy, as the Jacobins assert, with Robespierre at the head?"

"Yes; only he comes from the wife's boudoir, not the lord's study. To suppose Lord de Stael has a hand in it, is to suppose he is master in his own house. Goodness, no; this is not an embassador's treachery, but a loving woman's weakness. Nothing but Love, the great, eternal magician, could impel a woman to put the gigantic sword of the revolution in that frivolous rake's hands."

"Do you allude to the demagogue Isnard kissed at the Jacobin Club?"

"Alas, madame, I speak of the one suspended over your head."

"Therefore, it is your opinion that we are wrong to accept De Narbonne as Minister of War?"

"You would do better to take at once his successor, Dumouriez."

"A soldier of fortune?"

"Ha! the worst word is spoken; and it is unfair any way."

"Was not Dumouriez a private soldier?"

"I am well aware that Dumouriez is not of that court nobility to which everything is sacrificed. Of the rustic nobility, unable to

obtain a rank, he enlisted as a common soldier. At twenty years he fought five or six troopers, though hacked badly, and despite this proof of courage, he languished in the ranks."

"He sharpened his wits by serving Louis XV. as spy."

"Why do you call that spying in him which you rate diplomacy in others? I know that he carried on correspondence with the king without the knowledge of the ministers; but what noble of the court does not do the same?"

"But, doctor, this man whom you recommend is essentially a most immoral one," exclaimed the queen, betraying her deep knowledge of politics by the details into which she went. "He has no principles – no idea of honor. The Duke of Choiseul told me that he laid before him two plans about Corsica – one to set her free, the other to subdue her."

"Quite true; but Choiseul failed to say that the former was preferred, and that Dumouriez fought bravely for its success."

"The day when we accept him for minister it will be equivalent to a declaration of war to all Europe."

"Why, madame, this declaration is already made in all hearts," retorted Gilbert. "Do you know how many names are down in this district as volunteers to start for the campaign? Six hundred thousand. In the Jura, the women have proposed all the men shall march, as they, with pikes, will guard their homes."

"You have spoken a word which makes me shudder – pikes! Oh, the pikes of '89! I can ever see the heads of my Life Guardsmen carried on the pikes' point."

"Nevertheless, it was a woman, a mother, who suggested a national subscription to manufacture pikes."

"Was it also a woman who suggested your Jacobins adopting the red cap of liberty, the color of blood?"

"Your majesty is in error on that point," said Gilbert, although he did not care to enlighten the queen wholly on the ancient head-gear. "A symbol was wanted of equality, and as all Frenchmen could not well dress alike, a part of a dress was alone adopted: the cap such as the poor peasant wears. The red color was preferred, not as it happens to be that of blood, but because gay, bright, and a favorite with the masses."

"All very fine, doctor," sneered the queen. "I do not despair of seeing such a partisan of novelties coming some day to feel the king's pulse, with the red cap on your head and a pike in your hand."

Seeing that she could not win with such a man, the queen retired, half jesting, half bitter.

Princess Elizabeth was about to do the same, when Gilbert appealed to her:

"You love your brother, do you not?"

"Love? The feeling is of adoration."

"Then you are ready to transmit good advice to him, coming from a friend?"

"Then, speak, speak!"

"When his Feuillant Ministry falls, which will not take long, let him take a ministry with all the members wearing this red

cap, though it so alarms the queen." And profoundly bowing, he went out.

CHAPTER III.
POWERFUL, PERHAPS; HAPPY, NEVER

The Narbonne Ministry lasted three months. A speech of Vergniaud blasted it. On the news that the Empress of Russia had made a treaty with Turkey, and Austria and Prussia had signed an alliance, offensive and defensive, he sprung into the rostrum and cried:

"I see the palace from here where this counter-revolution is scheming those plots which aim to deliver us to Austria. The day has come when you must put an end to so much audacity, and confound the plotters. Out of that palace have issued panic and terror in olden times, in the name of despotism – let them now rush into it in the name of the law!"

Dread and terror did indeed enter the Tuileries, whence De Narbonne, wafted thither by a breath of love, was expelled by a gust of storm. This downfall occurred at the beginning of March, 1792.

Scarce three months after the interview of Gilbert and the queen, a small, active, nervy little man, with flaming eyes blazing in a bright face, was ushered into King Louis' presence. He was aged fifty-six, but appeared ten years younger, though his cheek was brown with camp-fire smoke; he wore the uniform of a

camp-marshal.

The king cast a dull and heavy glance on the little man, whom he had never met; but it was not without observation. The other fixed on him a scrutinizing eye full of fire and distrust.

"You are General Dumouriez? Count de Narbonne, I believe, called you to Paris?"

"To announce that he gave me a division in the army in Alsace."

"But you did not join, it appears?"

"Sire, I accepted; but I felt that I ought to point out that as war impended" – Louis started visibly – "and threatened to become general," went on the soldier, without appearing to remark the emotion, "I deemed it good to occupy the south, where an attack might come unawares; consequently, it seemed urgent to me that a plan for movements there should be drawn up, and a general and army sent thither."

"Yes; and you gave this plan to Count de Narbonne, after showing it to members of the Gironde?"

"They are friends of mine, as I believe they are of your majesty."

"Then I am dealing with a Girondist?" queried the monarch, smiling.

"With a patriot, and faithful subject of his king."

Louis bit his thick lips.

"Was it to serve the king and the country the more efficaciously that you refused to be foreign minister for a time?"

"Sire, I replied that I preferred, to being any kind of minister, the command promised me. I am a soldier, not a statesman."

"I have been assured, on the contrary, that you are both," observed the sovereign.

"I am praised too highly, sire."

"It was on that assurance that I insisted."

"Yes, sire; but in spite of my great regret, I was obliged to persist in refusing."

"Why refuse?"

"Because it is a crisis. It has upset De Narbonne and compromises Lessart. Any man has the right to keep out of employment or be employed, according to what he thinks he is fitted for. Now, my liege, I am good for something or for nothing. If the latter, leave me in my obscurity. Who knows for what fate you draw me forth? If I am good for something, do not give me power for an instant, the premier of a day, but place some solid footing under me that I may be your support at another day. Our affairs – your majesty will pardon me already regarding his business as mine – our affairs are in too great disfavor abroad for courts to deal with an *ad interim* ministry; this interregnum – you will excuse the frankness of an old soldier" – no one was less frank than Dumouriez, but he wanted to appear so at times – "this interval will be a blunder against which the House will revolt, and it will make me disliked there; more, I must say that it will injure the king, who will seem still to cling to his former Cabinet, and only be waiting for a chance to bring it back."

"Were that my intention, do you not believe it possible, sir?"

"I believe, sire, that it is full time to drop the past."

"And make myself a Jacobin, as you have said to my valet, Laporte?"

"Forsooth, did your majesty this, it would perplex all the parties, and the Jacobins most of all."

"Why not straightway advise me to don the red cap?"

"I wish I saw you in it," said Dumouriez.

For an instant the king eyed with distrust the man who had thus replied to him; and then he resumed:

"So you want a permanent office?"

"I am wishing nothing at all, only ready to receive the king's orders; still, I should prefer them to send me to the frontier to retaining me in town."

"But if I give you the order to stay, and the foreign office portfolio in permanency, what will you say?"

"That your majesty has dispelled your prejudices against me," returned the general, with a smile.

"Well, yes, entirely, general; you are my premier."

"Sire, I am devoted to your service; but – "

"Restrictions?"

"Explanations, sire. The first minister's place is not what it was. Without ceasing to be your majesty's faithful servant on entering the post, I become the man of the nation. From this day, do not expect the language my predecessors used; I must speak according to the Constitution and liberty. Confined to my duties,

I shall not play the courtier; I shall not have the time, and I drop all etiquette so as to better serve the king. I shall only work with you in private or at the council – and I warn you that it will be hard work."

"Hard work – why?"

"Why, it is plain; almost all your diplomatic corps are anti-revolutionists. I must urge you to change them, cross your tastes on the new choice, propose officials of whom your majesty never so much as heard the names, and others who will displease."

"In which case?" quickly interrupted Louis.

"Then I shall obey when your majesty's repugnance is too strong and well-founded, as you are the master; but if your choice is suggested by your surroundings, and is clearly made to get me into trouble, I shall entreat your majesty to find a successor for me. Sire, think of the dreadful dangers besieging your throne, and that one must have the public confidence in support; sire, this depends on you."

"Let me stay you a moment; I have long pondered over these dangers." He stretched out his hand to the portrait of Charles I. of England, by Vandyke, and continued, while wiping his forehead with his handkerchief: "This would remind me, if I were to forget them. It is the same situation, with similar dangers; perhaps the scaffold of Whitehall is erecting on City Hall Place."

"You are looking too far ahead, my lord."

"Only to the horizon. In this event, I shall march to the scaffold as Charles I. did, not perhaps as knightly, but at least as like a

Christian. Proceed, general."

Dumouriez was checked by this firmness, which he had not expected.

"Sire, allow me to change the subject."

"As you like; I only wish to show that I am not daunted by the prospect they try to frighten me with, but that I am prepared for even this emergency."

"If I am still regarded as your Minister of Foreign Affairs, I will bring four dispatches to the first consul. I notify your majesty that they will not resemble those of previous issue in style or principles; they will suit the circumstances. If this first piece of work suits your majesty, I will continue; if not, my carriage will be waiting to carry me to serve king and country on the border; and, whatever may be said about my diplomatic ability," added Dumouriez, "war is my true element, and the object of my labors these thirty-six years."

"Wait," said the other, as he bowed before going out; "we agree on one point, but there are six more to settle."

"My colleagues?"

"Yes; I do not want you to say that you are hampered by such a one. Choose your Cabinet, sir."

"Sire, you are fixing grave responsibility on me."

"I believe I am meeting your wishes by putting it on you."

"Sire, I know nobody at Paris save one, Lacoste, whom I propose for the navy office."

"Lacoste? A clerk in the naval stores, I believe?" questioned

the king.

"Who resigned rather than connive at some foul play."

"That's a good recommendation. What about the others?'"

"I must consult Petion, Brissot, Condorcet – "

"The Girondists, in short?"

"Yes, sire."

"Let the Gironde pass; we shall see if they will get us out of the ditch better than the other parties."

"We have still to learn if the four dispatches will suit."

"We might learn that this evening; we can hold an extraordinary council, composed of yourself, Grave, and Gerville – Duport has resigned. But do not go yet; I want to commit you."

He had hardly spoken before the queen and Princess Elizabeth stood in the room, holding prayer-books.

"Ladies," said the king, "this is General Dumouriez, who promises to serve us well, and will arrange a new Cabinet with us this evening."

Dumouriez bowed, while the queen looked hard at the little man who was to exercise so much influence over the affairs of France.

"Do you know Doctor Gilbert?" she asked. "If not, make his acquaintance as an excellent prophet. Three months ago he foretold that you would be Count de Narbonne's successor."

The main doors opened, for the king was going to mass. Behind him Dumouriez went out; but the courtiers shunned him

as though he had the leprosy.

"I told you I should get you committed," whispered the monarch.

"Committed to you, but not to the aristocracy," returned the warrior; "it is a fresh favor the king grants me." Whereupon he retired.

At the appointed hour he returned with the four dispatches promised – for Spain, Prussia, England, and Austria. He read them to the king and Messieurs Grave and Gerville, but he guessed that he had another auditor behind the tapestry by its shaking.

The new ruler spoke in the king's name, but in the sense of the Constitution, without threats, but also without weakness. He discussed the true interests of each power relatively to the French Revolution. As each had complained of the Jacobin pamphlets, he ascribed the despicable insults to the freedom of the press, a sun which made weeds to grow as well as good grain to flourish. Lastly, he demanded peace in the name of a free nation, of which the king was the hereditary representative.

The listening king lent fresh interest to each paper.

"I never heard the like, general," he said, when the reading was over.

"That is how ministers should speak and write in the name of rulers," observed Gerville.

"Well, give me the papers; they shall go off to-morrow," the king said.

"Sire, the messengers are waiting in the palace yard," said Dumouriez.

"I wanted to have a duplicate made to show the queen," objected the king, with marked hesitation.

"I foresaw the wish, and have copies here," replied Dumouriez.

"Send off the dispatches," rejoined the king.

The general took them to the door, behind which an aid was waiting. Immediately the gallop of several horses was heard leaving the Tuileries together.

"Be it so," said the king, replying to his mind, as the meaning sounds died away. "Now, about your Cabinet?"

"Monsieur Gerville pleads that his health will not allow him to remain, and Monsieur Grave, stung by a criticism of Madame Roland, wishes to hold office until his successor is found. I therefore pray your majesty to receive Colonel Servan, an honest man in the full acceptation of the words, of a solid material, pure manners, philosophical austerity, and a heart like a woman's, withal an enlightened patriot, a courageous soldier, and a vigilant statesman."

"Colonel Servan is taken. So we have three ministers: Dumouriez for the Foreign Office, Servan for War, and Lacoste for the Navy. Who shall be in the Treasury?"

"Clavieres, if you will. He is a man with great financial friends and supreme skill in handling money."

"Be it so. As for the Law lord?"

"A lawyer of Bordeaux has been recommended to me – Duranthon."

"Belonging to the Gironde party, of course?"

"Yes, sire, but enlightened, upright, a very good citizen, though slow and feeble; we will infuse fire into him and be strong enough for all of us."

"The Home Department remains."

"The general opinion is that this will be fitted to Roland."

"You mean Madame Roland?"

"To the Roland couple. I do not know them, but I am assured that the one resembles a character of Plutarch and the other a woman from Livy."

"Do you know that your Cabinet is already called the Breechless Ministry?"

"I accept the nickname, with the hope that it will be found without *breaches*."

"We will hold the council with them the day after to-morrow."

General Dumouriez was going away with his colleagues, when a valet called him aside and said that the king had something more to say to him.

"The king or the queen?" he questioned.

"It is the queen, sir; but she thought there was no need for those gentlemen to know that."

And Weber – for this was the Austrian foster-brother of Marie Antoinette – conducted the general to the queen's apartments, where he introduced him as the person sent for.

Dumouriez entered, with his heart beating more violently than when he led a charge or mounted the deadly breach. He fully understood that he had never stood in worse danger. The road he traveled was strewn with corpses, and he might stumble over the dead reputations of premiers, from Calonne to Lafayette.

The queen was walking up and down, with a very red face. She advanced with a majestic and irritated air as he stopped on the sill where the door had been closed behind him.

"Sir, you are all-powerful at this juncture," she said, breaking the ice with her customary vivacity. "But it is by favor of the populace, who soon shatter their idols. You are said to have much talent. Have the wit, to begin with, to understand that the king and I will not suffer novelties. Your constitution is a pneumatic machine; royalty stifles in it for want of air. So I have sent for you to learn, before you go further, whether you side with us or with the Jacobins."

"Madame," responded Dumouriez, "I am pained by this confidence, although I expected it, from the impression that your majesty was behind the tapestry."

"Which means that you have your reply ready?"

"It is that I stand between king and country, but before all I belong to the country."

"The country?" sneered the queen. "Is the king no longer anything, that everybody belongs to the country and none to him?"

"Excuse me, lady; the king is always the king, but he has taken

oath to the Constitution, and from that day he should be one of the first slaves of the Constitution."

"A compulsory oath, and in no way binding, sir!"

Dumouriez held his tongue for a space, and, being a consummate actor, he regarded the speaker with deep pity.

"Madame," he said, at length, "allow me to say that your safety, the king's, your children's, all, are attached to this Constitution which you deride, and which will save you, if you consent to be saved by it. I should serve you badly, as well as the king, if I spoke otherwise to you."

The queen interrupted him with an imperious gesture.

"Oh, sir, sir, I assure you that you are on the wrong path!" she said; adding, with an indescribable accent of threat: "Take heed for yourself!"

"Madame," replied Dumouriez, in a perfectly calm tone, "I am over fifty years of age; my life has been traversed with perils, and on taking the ministry I said to myself that ministerial responsibility was not the slightest danger I ever ran."

"Fy, sir!" returned the queen, slapping her hands together; "you have nothing more to do than to slander me?"

"Slander you, madame?"

"Yes; do you want me to explain the meaning of the words I used? It is that I am capable of having you assassinated. For shame, sir!"

Tears escaped from her eyes. Dumouriez had gone as far as she wanted; he knew that some sensitive fiber remained in that

indurated heart.

"Lord forbid I should so insult my queen!" he cried. "The nature of your majesty is too grand and noble for the worst of her enemies to be inspired with such an idea, she has given heroic proofs which I have admired, and which attached me to her."

"Then excuse me, and lend me your arm. I am so weak that I often fear I shall fall in a swoon."

Turning pale, she indeed drooped her head backward. Was it reality, or only one of the wiles in which this fearful Medea was so skilled? Keen though the general was, he was deceived; or else, more cunning than the enchantress, he feigned to be caught.

"Believe me, madame," he said, "that I have no interest in cheating you. I abhor anarchy and crime as much as yourself. Believe, too, that I have experience, and am better placed than your majesty to see events. What is transpiring is not an intrigue of the Duke of Orleans, as you are led to think; not the effect of Pitt's hatred, as you have supposed; not even the outcome of popular impulse, but the almost unanimous insurrection of a great nation against inveterate abuses. I grant that there is in all this great hates which fan the flames. Leave the lunatics and the villains on one side; let us see nothing in this revolution in progress but the king and the nation, all tending to separate them brings about their mutual ruin. I come, my lady, to work my utmost to reunite them; aid me, instead of thwarting me. You mistrust me? Am I an obstacle to your anti-revolutionary projects? Tell me so, madame, I will forthwith

hand my resignation to the king, and go and wail the fate of my country and its ruler in some nook."

"No, no," said the queen; "remain, and excuse me."

"Do you ask me to excuse you? Oh, madame, I entreat you not to humble yourself thus."

"Why should I not be humble? Am I still a queen? am I yet treated like a woman?"

Going to the window, she opened it in spite of the evening coolness; the moon silvered the leafless trees of the palace gardens.

"Are not the air and the sunshine free to all? Well, these are refused to me; I dare not put my head out of window, either on the street or the gardens. Yesterday I did look out on the yard, when a Guards gunner hailed me with an insulting nickname, and said: 'How I should like to carry your head on a bayonet-point.' This morning, I opened the garden window. A man standing on a chair was reading infamous stuff against me; a priest was dragged to a fountain to be ducked; and meanwhile, as though such scenes were matters of course, children were sailing their balloons and couples were strolling tranquilly. What times we are living in – what a place to live in – what a people! And would you have me still believe myself a queen, and even feel like a woman?"

She threw herself on a sofa, and hid her face in her hands.

Dumouriez dropped on one knee, and taking up the hem of her dress respectfully, he kissed it.

"Lady," he said, "from the time when I undertake this struggle,

you will become the mighty queen and the happy woman once more, or I shall leave my life on the battle-field."

Rising, he saluted the lady and hurried out. She watched him go with a hopeless look, repeating:

"The mighty queen? Perhaps, thanks to your sword – for it is possible; but the happy woman – never, never, never!"

She let her head fall between the sofa cushions, muttering the name dearer every day and more painful:

"Charny!"

The Dumouriez Cabinet might be called one of war.

On the first of March, the Emperor Leopold died in the midst of his Italian harem, slain by self-compounded aphrodisiacs. The queen, who had read in some lampoon that a penny pie would settle the monarchy, and who had called Dr. Gilbert in to get an antidote, cried aloud that her brother was poisoned. With him passed all the halting policy of Austria.

Francis II., who mounted the throne, was of mixed Italian and German blood. An Austrian born at Florence, he was weak, violent, and tricky. The priests reckoned him an honest man; his hard and bigoted soul hid its duplicity under a rosy face of dreadful sameness. He walked like a stage ghost; he gave his daughter to a conqueror rather than part with his estate, and then stabbed him in the back at his first retreating step in the snows. Francis II. remains in history the tyrant of the Leads of Venice and the Spitzberg dungeons, and the torturer of Andryane and Silvio Pellico.

This was the protector of the French fugitives, the ally of Prussia and the enemy of France. He held Embassador Noailles as a prisoner at Vienna.

The French embassador to Berlin, Segur, was preceded by a rumor that he expected to gain the secrets of the King of Prussia by making love to his mistresses – this King of Prussia was a lady-killer! Segur presented himself at the same time as the envoy from the self-exiled princes at Coblentz.

The king turned his back on the French representative, and asked pointedly after the health of the Prince of Artois.

These were the two ostensible foes; the hidden ones were Spain, Russia, and England. The chief of the coalition was to be the King of Sweden, that dwarf in giant's armor whom Catherine II. held up in her hand.

With the ascension of Francis, the diplomatic note came: Austria was to rule in France, Avignon was to be restored to the pope, and things in France were to go back to where they stood in June, 1789.

This note evidently agreed with the secret wishes of the king and the queen. Dumouriez laughed at it. But he took it to the king.

As much as Marie Antoinette, the woman for extreme measures, desired a war which she believed one of deliverance for her, the king feared it, as the man for the medium, slowness, wavering, and crooked policy. Indeed, suppose a victory in the war, he would be at the mercy of the victorious general; suppose

a defeat, and the people would hold him responsible, cry treason, and rush on the palace!

In short, should the enemy penetrate to Paris, what would it bring? The king's brother, Count Provence, who aimed to be regent of the realm. The result of the return of the runaway princes would be the king deposed, Marie Antoinette pronounced an adulteress, and the royal children proclaimed, perhaps, illegitimate.

The king trusted foreigners, but not the princes of his own blood and kingdom.

On reading the note, he comprehended that the hour to draw the sword for France had come, and that there was no receding.

Who was to bear the flag of the revolution? Lafayette, who had lost his fame by massacring the populace on the Paris parade-ground; Luckner, who was known only by the mischief he wrought in the Seven Years' War, and old Rochambeau, the French naval hero in the American Revolution, who was for defensive war, and was vexed to see Dumouriez promote young blood over his head without benefiting by his experience.

It was expected that Lafayette would be victorious in the north; when he would be commander-in-chief, Dumouriez would be the Minister of War; they would cast down the red cap and crush Jacobins and Girondists with the two hands.

The counter-revolution was ready.

But what were Robespierre and the Invisibles doing – that great secret society which held the agitators in its grasp as Jove

holds the writhing thunder-bolts? Robespierre was in the shade, and many asserted that he was bribed by the royal family.

At the outset all went well for the Royalists; Lafayette's lieutenants, two Royalists, Dillon and Biron, headed a rout before Lille; the scouts, dragoons, still the most aristocratic arm of the service, turned tail and started a panic. The runaways accused the captains of treachery, and murdered Dillon and other officers. The Gironde accused the queen and Court party of organizing the flight.

The popular clamor compelled Marie Antoinette to let the Constitutional Guard be abolished – another name for a royal life-guard – and it was superseded by the Paris National Guards.

Oh! Charny, Charny, where were you? – you who, at Varennes, nearly rescued the queen with but three hundred horsemen – what would you not have done at Paris with six thousand desperadoes?

Charny was happy, forgetting everything in the arms of his countess.

CHAPTER IV.
THE FOES FACE TO FACE

While the queen was looking from the palace to see the Austrians coming, another was watching in her little reception-rooms. One was revolution embodied, the other its opponents intensified; that was Madame Roland, this the queen from Austria.

The real war at this period was between this pair.

A singular thing, both had such influence over their husbands as to lead them to death, although by different roads.

Dumouriez had thrown a sop to the Jacobins without knowing who the Colonel Servan was whom he took for Minister of War. He was a favorite of Madame Roland. Like all the Girondists, of whom she was the light, the fire, the egeria, he was inspired by that valiant spirit.

But he and Roland were neutralized at the council by Dumouriez. They had forced the Royalist Constitutional Guards to disband, but they had merely changed their uniform for that of the Swiss Guards, the sworn defenders of royalty, and swaggered about the streets more insolently than before.

Madame Roland suggested that, on the occasion of the July festivals, a camp of twenty thousand volunteers should be established in Paris. Servan was to present this as a citizen, apart

from his being a minister. In the same way, Roland was to punish the rebellious priests who were preaching from the pulpits that taxpayers would be damned, by ordering their exile.

Dumouriez supported the volunteer proposition at the council, in the hope that the new-comers would be Jacobins; that is, the Invisibles, by whom neither the Girondists nor the Feuillants would profit.

"If your majesty vetoes it," he said, firmly, "instead of the twenty thousand authorized, we shall have forty thousand unruly spirits in town, who may with one rush upset Constitution, Assembly, and the throne. Had we been vanquishers – But we must give in – I say accept."

But the queen urged the king to stand firm. As we know, she would rather be lost than be saved by Lafayette.

As for the decree against the priests, it was another matter. The king said that he wavered in temporal questions as he judged them with his mind, which was fallible; but he tried religious matters with his conscience, which was infallible!

But they could not dispense with Dumouriez at this juncture.

"Accept the volunteer act," said the queen, at last; "let the camp be at Soissons, where the general says he will gradually draft them off out of the way; and – well, we will see about the decree aimed at the priests. Dumouriez has your promise, but there must be some way of evading the issue when you are the Jesuits' pupil!"

Roland, Servan, and Clavieres resigned, and the Assembly

applauded their act as deserving the thanks of the country.

Hearing of this, and that Dumouriez was badly compromised, the pupil of Vauguyon agreed to the Volunteer Camp Bill, but pleading conscientious scruples, deferred signing the decree banishing the refractory priests. This made the new ministers wince, and Dumouriez went away sore at heart. The king had almost succeeded in baffling him, the fine diplomatist, sharp politician, and the general whose courage was doubled by intrigue!

He found at home the spies' reports that the Invisibles were holding meetings in the working quarters, and openly at Santerre's brewery. He wrote to warn the king, whose answer was:

"Do not believe that I can be bullied; my mind is made up."

Dumouriez replied, asking for an audience, and requested his successor to be sought for. It was clear that the anti-revolutionist party felt strong.

Indeed, they were reckoning on the following forces:

The Constitutional Guards, six thousand strong, disbanded, but ready to fly to arms at the first call; seven or eight thousand Knights of the Order of St. Louis, whose red ribbon was the rallying token; three battalions of Switzers, sixteen hundred men, picked soldiers, unshaken as the old Helvetic rocks.

Better than all, Lafayette had written: "Persist, sire; fortified with the authority the National Assembly has delegated to you, you will find all good citizens on your side!"

The plan was to gather all the forces at a given signal, seize the cannon of each section of Paris, shut up the Jacobin's Club-house and the Assembly, add all the Royalists in the National Guard, say, a contingent of fifteen thousand men, and wait for Lafayette, who might march up in three days.

The misfortune was that the queen would not hear of Lafayette. Lafayette was merely the Revolution moderated, and might prolong it and lead to a republic like that he had brought round in America; while the Jacobins' outrageous rule would sicken the people and could not endure.

Oh, had Charny been at hand! But it was not even known where he was; and were it known, it would be too low an abasement for the woman, if not the queen, to have recourse to him.

The night passed tumultuously at the palace, where they had the means of defense and attack, but not a hand strong enough to grasp and hurl them.

Dumouriez and his colleagues came to resign. They affirmed they were willing to die for the king, but to do this for the clergy would only precipitate the downfall of the monarchy.

"Sire," pleaded Dumouriez, "your conscience is misled; you are beguiled into civil war. Without strength, you must succumb, and history, while sorrowing for you, will blame you for causing the woes of France."

"Heaven be my witness that I wished but her happiness!"

"I do not doubt that; but one must account to the King of

kings not only for purity of intentions, but the enlightened use of intentions. You suppose you are saving religion, but you will destroy it; your priests will be massacred; your broken crown will roll in your blood, the queen's, your children's, perhaps – oh, my king, my king!"

Choking, he applied his lips to the royal hand. With perfect serenity, and a majesty of which he might not be believed capable, Louis replied.

"You are right, general. I expect death, and forgive my murderers beforehand. You have well served me; I esteem you, and am affected by your sympathy. Farewell, sir!"

With Dumouriez going, royalty had parted with its last stay. The king threw off the mask, and stood with uncovered face before the people.

Let us see what the people were doing on their side.

CHAPTER V.
THE UNINVITED VISITORS

All day long a man in general's uniform was riding about the St. Antoine suburb, on a large Flanders horse, shaking hands right and left, kissing the girls and treating the men to drink. This was one of Lafayette's half dozen heirs, the small-change of the commander of the National Guard – Battalion Commander Santerre.

Beside him rode, on a fiery charger, like an aid next his general, a stout man who might by his dress be taken to be a well-to-do farmer. A scar tracked his brow, and he had as gloomy an eye and scowling a face as the battalion commander had an open countenance and frank smile.

"Get ready, my good friends; watch over the nation, against which traitors are plotting. But we are on guard," Santerre kept saying.

"What are we to do, friend Santerre?" asked the working-men. "You know that we are all your own. Where are the traitors? Lead us at them!"

"Wait; the proper time has not come."

"When will it strike?"

Santerre did not know a word about it; so he replied at a hazard, "Keep ready; we'll let you know."

But the man who rode by his knee, bending down over the horse's neck, would make signs to some men, and whisper:

"June twenty."

Whereupon these men would call groups of twenty or so around each, and repeat the date to them, so that it would be circulated. Nobody knew what would be done on the twentieth of June, but all felt sure that something would happen on that day.

By whom was this mob moved, stirred, and excited? By a man of powerful build, leonine mane, and roaring voice, whom Santerre was to find waiting in his brewery office – Danton.

None better than this terrible wizard of the Revolution could evoke terror from the slums and hurl it into the old palace of Catherine di Medicis. Danton was the gong of riots; the blow he received he imparted vibratingly to all the multitude around him. Through Hebert he was linked to the populace, as by the Duke of Orleans he was affixed to the throne.

Whence came his power, doomed to be so fatal to royalty? To the queen, the spiteful Austrian who had not liked Lafayette to be mayor of Paris, but preferred Petion, the Republican, who had no sooner brought back the fugitive king to the Tuileries than he set to watch him closely.

Petion had made his two friends, Manuel and Danton, the Public Prosecutor and the Vice, respectively.

On the twentieth of June, under the pretext of presenting a petition to the king and raising a liberty pole, the palace was to be stormed.

The adepts alone knew that France was to be saved from the Lafayettes and the Moderates, and a warning to be given to the incorrigible monarch that there are some political tempests in which a vessel may be swamped with all hands aboard; that is, a king be overwhelmed with throne and family as in the oceanic abysses.

Billet knew more than Santerre when he accompanied him on his tour, after presenting himself as from the committee.

Danton called on the brewer to arrange for the meeting of the popular leaders that night at Charenton for the march on the morrow, presumably to the House, but really to the Tuileries.

The watchword was, "Have done with the palace!" but the way remained vague.

On the evening of the nineteenth, the queen saw a woman clad in scarlet, with a belt full of pistols, gallop, bold and terrible, along the main streets. It was Theroigne Mericourt, the beauty of Liege, who had gone back to her native country to help its rebellion; but the Austrians had caught her and kept her imprisoned for eighteen months.

She returned mysteriously to be at the bloody feast of the coming day. The courtesan of opulence, she was now the beloved of the people; from her noble lovers had come the funds for her costly weapons, which were not all for show. Hence the mob hailed her with cheers.

From the Tuileries garret, where the queen had climbed on hearing the uproar, she saw tables set out in the public squares

and wine broached; patriotic songs were sung and at every toast fists were shaken at the palace.

Who were the guests? The Federals of Marseilles, led by Barbaroux, who brought with them the song worth an army – "the Marseillaise Hymn of Liberty."

Day breaks early in June. At five o'clock the battalions were marshaled, for the insurrection was regularized by this time and had a military aspect. The mob had chiefs, submitted to discipline, and fell into assigned places under flags.

Santerre was on horseback, with his staff of men from the working district. Billet did not leave him, for the occult power of the Invisibles charged him to watch over him.

Of the three corps into which the forces were divided, Santerre commanded the first, St. Huruge the second, and Theroigne the last.

About eleven, on an order brought by an unknown man, the immense mass started out. It numbered some twenty thousand when it left the Bastile Square.

It had a wild, odd, and horrible look.

Santerre's battalion was the most regular, having many in uniform, and muskets and bayonets among the weapons. But the other two were armed mobs, haggard, thin, and in rags from three years of revolutions and four of famine.

Neither had uniforms nor muskets, but tattered coats and smocks; quaint arms snatched up in the first impulse of self-defense and anger: pikes, cooking-spits, jagged spears, hiltless

swords, knives lashed to long poles, broad-axes, stone-masons' hammers and curriers' knives.

For standards, a gallows with a dangling doll, meant for the queen; a bull's head, with an obscene card stuck on the horns; a calf's heart on a spit, with the motto: "An Aristocrat's;" while flags showed the legends: "Sanction the decrees, or death!" – "Recall the patriotic ministers!" – "Tremble, tyrant; your hour has come!"

At every crossing and from each by-way the army was swollen.

The mass was silent, save now and then when a cheer burst from the midst, or a snatch of the "It shall go on" was sung, or cries went up of "The nation forever!" – "Long live the Breechless!" – "Down with Old Veto and Madame Veto!"

They came out for sport – to frighten the king and queen, and did not mean murdering. They demanded to march past the Assembly through the Hall, and for three hours they defiled under the eyes of their representatives.

It was three o'clock. The mob had obtained half their programme, the placing of their petition before the Assembly. The next thing was to call on the king for his sanction to the decree.

As the Assembly had received them, how could the king refuse? Surely he was not a greater potentate than the Speaker of the House, whose chair was like his and in the grander place?

In fact, the king assented to receiving their deputation of twenty.

As the common people had never entered the palace, they merely expected their representatives would be received while they marched by under the windows. They would show the king their banners with the odd devices and the gory standards.

All the palace garden gates were closed; in the yards and gardens were soldiers with four field-pieces. Seeing this apparently ample protection, the royal family might be tranquil.

Still without any evil idea, the crowd asked for the gates to be opened which allowed entrance on the Feuillants Terrace.

Three municipal officers went in and got leave from the king for passage to be given over the terrace and out by the stable doors.

Everybody wanted to go in as soon as the gates were open, and the throng spread over the lawn; it was forgotten to open the outlet by the stables, and the crush began to be severe. They streamed before the National Guards in a row along the palace wall to the Carrousel gates, by which they might have resumed the homeward route. They were locked and guarded.

Sweltering, crushed, and turned about, the mob began to be irritated. Before its growls the gates were opened and the men spread over the capacious square.

There they remembered what the main affair was – to petition the king to revoke his veto. Instead of continuing the road, they waited in the square for an hour, when they grew impatient.

They might have gone away, but that was not the aim of the agitators, who went from group to group, saying:

"Stay; what do you want to sneak away for? The king is going to give his sanction; if we were to go home without that, we should have all our work to do over again."

The level-headed thought this sensible advice, but at the same time that the sanction was a long time coming. They were getting hungry, and that was the general cry.

Bread was not so dear as it had been, but there was no work going on, and however cheap bread may be, it is not made for nothing.

Everybody had risen at five, workmen and their wives, with their children, and come to the palace with the idea that they had but to get the royal sanction to have hard times end. But the king did not seem to be at all eager to give his sanction.

It was hot, and thirst began to be felt. Hunger, thirst, and heat drive dogs mad; yet the poor people waited and kept patient. But those next to the railings set to shaking them. A municipal officer made a speech to them:

"Citizens, this is the king's residence, and to enter with arms is to violate it. The king is quite ready to receive your petition, but only from twenty deputies bearing it."

What! had not their deputation, sent in an hour ago, been attended to yet?

Suddenly loud shouts were heard on the streets. It was Santerre, Billet, and Huruge on their horses, and Theroigne riding on her cannon.

"What are you fellows hanging round this gate for?" queried

Huruge. "Why do you not go right in?"

"Just so; why haven't we?" said the thousands.

"Can't you see it is fast?" cried several voices.

Theroigne jumped off her cannon, saying:

"The barker is full to the muzzle; let's blow the old gate open."

"Wait! wait!" shouted two municipal officers; "no roughness. It shall be opened to you."

Indeed, by pressing on the spring-catch they released the two gates, which drew aside, and the mass rushed through.

Along with them came the cannon, which crossed the yard with them, mounted the steps, and reached the head of the stairs in their company. Here stood the city officials in their scarfs of office.

"What do you intend doing with a piece of artillery?" they challenged. "Great guns in the royal apartments! Do you believe anything is to be gained by such violence?"

"Quite right," said the ringleaders, astonished themselves to see the gun there; and they turned it round to get it down-stairs. The hub caught on the jamb, and the muzzle gaped on the crowd.

"Why, hang them all, they have got cannon all over the palace!" commented the new-comers, not knowing their own artillery.

Police-Magistrate Mouchet, a deformed dwarf, ordered the men to chop the wheel clear, and they managed to hack the door-jamb away so as to free the piece, which was taken down to the yard. This led to the report that the mob were smashing all the

doors in.

Some two hundred noblemen ran to the palace, not with the hope of defending it, but to die with the king, whose life they deemed menaced. Prominent among these was a man in black, who had previously offered his breast to the assassin's bullet, and who always leaped like a last Life-Guard between danger and the king, from whom he had tried to conjure it. This was Gilbert.

After being excited by the frightful tumult, the king and queen became used to it.

It was half past three, and it was hoped that the day would close with no more harm done.

Suddenly, the sound of the ax blows was heard above the noise of clamor, like the howling of a coming tempest. A man darted into the king's sleeping-room and called out:

"Sire, let me stand by you, and I will answer for all."

It was Dr. Gilbert, seen at almost periodical intervals, and in all the "striking situations" of the tragedy in play.

"Oh, doctor, is this you? What is it?" King and queen spoke together.

"The palace is surrounded, and the people are making this uproar in wanting to see you."

"We shall not leave you, sire," said the queen and Princess Elizabeth.

"Will the king kindly allow me for an hour such power as a captain has over his ship?" asked Gilbert.

"I grant it," replied the monarch. "Madame, hearken to Doctor

Gilbert's advice, and obey his orders, if needs must." He turned to the doctor: "Will you answer to me for the queen and the dauphin?"

"I do, or I shall die with them; it is all a pilot can say in the tempest!"

The queen wished to make a last effort, but Gilbert barred the way with his arms.

"Madame," he said, "it is you and not the king who run the real danger. Rightly or wrongly, they accuse you of the king's resistance, so that your presence will expose him without defending him. Be the lightning-conductor – divert the bolt, if you can!"

"Then let it fall on me, but save my children!"

"I have answered for you and them to the king. Follow me."

He said the same to Princess Lamballe, who had returned lately from London, and the other ladies, and guided them to the Council Hall, where he placed them in a window recess, with the heavy table before them.

The queen stood behind her children – Innocence protecting Unpopularity, although she wished it to be the other way.

"All is well thus," said Gilbert, in the tone of a general commanding a decisive operation; "do not stir."

There came a pounding at the door, which he threw open with both folds, and as he knew there were many women in the crowd, he cried:

"Walk in, citizenesses; the queen and her children await you."

The crowd burst in as through a broken dam.

"Where is the Austrian? where is the Lady Veto?" demanded five hundred voices.

It was the critical moment.

"Be calm," said Gilbert to the queen, knowing that all was in Heaven's hand, and man was as nothing. "I need not recommend you to be kind."

Preceding the others was a woman with her hair down, who brandished a saber; she was flushed with rage – perhaps from hunger.

"Where is the Austrian cat? She shall die by no hand but mine!" she screamed.

"This is she," said Gilbert, taking her by the hand and leading her up to the queen.

"Have I ever done you a personal wrong?" demanded the latter, in her sweetest voice.

"I can not say you have," faltered the woman of the people, amazed at the majesty and gentleness of Marie Antoinette.

"Then why should you wish to kill me?"

"Folks told me that you were the ruin of the nation," faltered the abashed young woman, lowering the point of her saber to the floor.

"Then you were told wrong. I married your King of France, and am mother of the prince whom you see here. I am a French woman, one who will nevermore see the land where she was born; in France alone I must dwell, happy or unhappy. Alas! I

was happy when you loved me." And she sighed.

The girl dropped the sword, and wept.

"Beg your pardon, madame, but I did not know what you were like. I see you are a good sort, after all."

"Keep on like that," prompted Gilbert, "and not only will you be saved, but all these people will be at your feet in an hour."

Intrusting her to some National Guardsmen and the War Minister, who came in with the mob, he ran to the king.

Louis had gone through a similar experience. On hastening toward the crowd, as he opened the Bull's-eye Room, the door panels were dashed in, and pikes, bayonets, and axes showed their points and edges.

"Open the doors!" cried the king.

Servants heaped up chairs before him, and four grenadiers stood in front, but he made them put up their swords, as the flash of steel might seem a provocation.

A ragged fellow, with a knife-blade set in a pole, darted at the king, yelling:

"Take that for your veto!"

One grenadier, who had not yet sheathed his sword, struck down the stick with the blade. But it was the king who, entirely recovering self-command, put the soldier aside with his hand, and said:

"Let me stand forward, sir. What have I to fear amid my people?"

Taking a forward step, Louis XVI., with a majesty not

expected in him, and a courage strange heretofore in him, offered his breast to the weapons of all sorts directed against him.

"Hold your noise!" thundered a stentorian voice in the midst of the awful din. "I want a word in here."

A cannon might have vainly sought to be heard in this clamor, but at this voice all the vociferation ceased. This was the butcher Legendre. He went up almost to touching the king, while they formed a ring round the two.

Just then, on the outer edge of the circle, a man made his appearance, and behind the dread double of Danton, the king recognized Gilbert, pale and serene of face. The questioning glance implying: "What have you done with the queen?" was answered by the doctor's smile to the effect that she was in safety. He thanked him with a nod.

"Sirrah," began Legendre.

This expression, which seemed to indicate that the sovereign was already deposed, made the latter turn as if a snake had stung him.

"Yes, sir, I am talking to you, Veto," went on Legendre. "Just listen to us, for it is our turn to have you hear us. You are a double-dealer, who have always cheated us, and would try it again, so look out for yourself. The measure is full, and the people are tired of being your plaything and victim."

"Well, I am listening to you, sir," rejoined the king.

"And a good thing, too. Do you know what we have come here for? To ask the sanction of the decrees and the recall of the

ministers. Here is our petition – see!"

Taking a paper from his pocket, he unfolded it, and read the same menacing lines which had been heard in the House. With his eyes fixed on the speaker, the king listened, and said, when it was ended, without the least apparent emotion:

"Sir, I shall do what the laws and the Constitution order me to do!"

"Gammon!" broke in a voice; "the Constitution is your high horse, which lets you block the road of the whole country, to keep France in-doors, for fear of being trampled on, and wait till the Austrians come up to cut her throat."

The king turned toward this fresh voice, comprehending that it was a worse danger. Gilbert also made a movement and laid his hand on the speaker's shoulder.

"I have seen you somewhere before, friend," remarked the king. "Who are you?"

He looked with more curiosity than fear, though this man wore a front of terrible resolution.

"Ay, you have seen me before, sire. Three times: once, when you were brought back from Versailles; next at Varennes; and the last time, here. Sire, bear my name in mind, for it is of ill omen. It is Billet."

At this the shouting was renewed, and a man with a lance tried to stab the king; but Billet seized the weapon, tore it from the wielder's grip, and snapped it across his knee.

"No foul play," he said; "only one kind of steel has the right

to touch this man: the ax of the executioner! I hear that a King of England had his head cut off by the people whom he betrayed – you ought to know his name, Louis. Don't you forget it."

"'Sh, Billet!" muttered Gilbert.

"Oh, you may say what you like," returned Billet, shaking his head; "this man is going to be tried and doomed as a traitor."

"Yes, a traitor!" yelled a hundred voices; "traitor, traitor!"

Gilbert threw himself in between.

"Fear nothing, sire, and try by some material token to give satisfaction to these mad men."

Taking the physician's hand, the king laid it on his heart.

"You see that I fear nothing," he said; "I received the sacraments this morning. Let them do what they like with me. As for the material sign which you suggest I should display – are you satisfied?"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.