

DUMAS ALEXANDRE

THE LAST
VENDÉE

Александр Дюма

The Last Vendée

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Содержание

THE LAST VENDÉE;	5
I.	5
II.	10
III.	14
IV.	18
V.	22
VI.	26
VII.	30
VIII.	34
IX.	39
X.	44
XI.	48
XII.	52
XIII.	57
XIV.	62
XV.	69
XVI.	75
XVII.	79
XVIII.	83
XIX.	89
XX.	93
XXI.	99
XXII.	105
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	108

Alexandre Dumas
The Last Vendée / or, the
She-Wolves of Machecoul

THE LAST VENDÉE;
OR,
THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL
VOLUME I

I.
CHARENTE'S AIDE-DE-CAMP

If you ever chanced, dear reader, to go from Nantes to Bourgneuf you must, before reaching Saint-Philbert, have skirted the southern corner of the lake of Grand-Lieu, and then, continuing your way, you arrived, at the end of one hour or two hours, according to whether you were on foot or in a carriage, at the first trees of the forest of Machecoul.

There, to left of the road, among a fine clump of trees belonging, apparently, to the forest from which it is separated only by the main road, you must have seen the sharp points of two slender turrets and the gray roof of a little castle hidden among the foliage.

The cracked walls of this manor-house, its broken windows, and its damp roofs covered with wild iris and parasite mosses, gave it, in spite of its feudal pretensions and flanking turrets, so forlorn an appearance that no one at a passing glance would envy its possessor, were it not for its exquisite situation opposite to the noble trees of the forest of Machecoul, the verdant billows of which rose on the horizon as far as the eye could reach.

In 1831, this little castle was the property of an old nobleman named the Marquis de Souday, and was called, after its owner, the château of Souday.

Let us now make known the owner, having described the château.

The Marquis de Souday was the sole representative and last descendant of an old and illustrious Breton family; for the lake of Grand-Lieu, the forest of Machecoul, the town of Bourgneuf, situated in that part of France now called the department of the Loire-Inférieure, was then part of the province of Brittany, before the division of France into departments. The family of the Marquis de Souday had been, in former times, one of those feudal trees with endless branches which extended themselves over the whole department; but the ancestors of the marquis, in consequence of spending all their substance to appear with splendor in the coaches of the king, had, little by little, become so reduced and shorn of their branches that the convulsions of 1789 happened just in time to prevent the rotten trunk from falling into the hands of the sheriff; in fact, they preserved it for an end more in keeping with its former glory.

When the doom of the Bastille sounded, and the demolition of the old house of the kings foreshadowed the overthrow of royalty, the Marquis de Souday, having inherited, not great wealth, – for nothing of that was left, as we have said, except the old manor-house, – but the name and title of his father, was page to his Royal Highness, Monsieur le Comte de Provence. At sixteen—that was then his time of life-events are only accidental circumstances; besides, it would have been extremely

difficult for any youth to keep from being heedless and volatile at the epicurean, voltairean, and constitutional court of the Luxembourg, where egotism elbowed its way undisguisedly.

It was M. de Souday who was sent to the place de Grève to watch for the moment when the hangman tightened the rope round Favras's neck, and the latter, by drawing his last breath, restored his Royal Highness to his normal peace of mind, which had been for the time being disturbed. The page had returned at full speed to the Luxembourg.

"Monseigneur, it is done," he said.

And monseigneur, in his clear, fluty voice, cried: -

"Come, gentlemen, to supper! to supper!"

And they supped as if a brave and honorable gentleman, who had given his life a sacrifice, to his Royal Highness, had not just been hanged as a murderer and a vagabond.

Then came the first dark, threatening days of the Revolution, the publication of the Red Book, Necker's retirement, and the death of Mirabeau.

One day-it was the 22d of February, 1791-a great crowd surrounded the palace of the Luxembourg. Rumors were spread. Monsieur, it was said, meant to escape and join the *émigrés* on the Rhine. But Monsieur appeared on the balcony, and took a solemn oath never to leave the king.

He did, in fact, start with the king on the 21st of June, possibly to keep his word never to leave him. But he did leave him, to secure his own safety, and reached the frontier tranquilly with his companion, the Marquis d'Avaray, while Louis XVI. and his family were arrested at Varennes.

Our young page, de Souday, thought too much of his reputation as a man of fashion to stay in France, although it was precisely there that the monarchy needed its most zealous supporters. He therefore emigrated, and as no one paid any heed to a page only eighteen years old, he reached Coblenz safely and took part in filling up the ranks of the musketeers who were then being remodelled on the other side of the Rhine under the orders of the Marquis de Montmorin. During the first royalist struggles he fought bravely under the three Condés, was wounded before Thionville, and then, after many disappointments and deceptions, met with the worst of all; namely, the disbanding of the various corps of *émigrés*, - a measure which took the bread out of the mouths of so many poor devils. It is true that these soldiers were serving against France, and their bread was baked by foreign nations.

The Marquis de Souday then turned his eyes toward Brittany and La Vendée, where fighting had been going on for the last two years. The state of things in La Vendée was as follows: -

All the first leaders of the great insurrection were dead. Cathélineau was killed at Vannes, Lescure at Tremblay, Bonchamps at Chollet; d'Elbée had been, or was to be, shot at Noirmoutiers; and, finally, what was called the Grand Army had just been annihilated in Le Mans.

This Grand Army had been defeated at Fontenay-le-Comte, at Saumur, Torfou, Laval, and Dol. Nevertheless, it had gained the advantage in sixty fights; it had held its own against all the forces of the Republic, commanded successively by Biron, Rossignol, Kléber, and Westermann. It had seen its homes burned, its children massacred, its old men strangled. Its leaders were Cathélineau, Henri de la Rochejaquelein, Stofflet, Bonchamps, Forestier, d'Elbée, Lescure, Marigny, and Talmont. In spite of all vicissitudes it continued faithful to its king when the rest of France abandoned him; it worshipped its God when Paris proclaimed that there was no God. Thanks to the loyalty and valor of this army, La Vendée won the right to be proclaimed in history throughout all time "the land of giants."

Charette and la Rochejaquelein alone were left. Charette had a few soldiers; la Rochejaquelein had none.

It was while the Grand Army was being slowly destroyed in Le Mans that Charette, appointed commander-in-chief of Lower Poitou and seconded by the Chevalier de Couëtu and Jolly, had collected his little army. Charette, at the head of this army, and la Rochejaquelein, followed by ten men only, met near Maulevrier. Charette instantly perceived that la Rochejaquelein came as a general, not as a soldier; he had a strong sense of his own position, and did not choose to share his command

with any one. He was therefore cold and haughty in manner, and went to his own breakfast without even asking Rochejaquelein to share it with him.

The same day eight hundred men left Charette's army and placed themselves under the orders of la Rochejaquelein. The next day Charette said to his young rival: -

"I start for Mortagne; you will follow me."

"I am accustomed," replied la Rochejaquelein, "not to follow, but to be followed."

He parted from Charette, and left him to operate his army as he pleased. It is the latter whom we shall now follow, because he is the only Vendéan leader whose last efforts and death are connected with our history.

Louis XVII. was dead, and on the 26th of June, 1795, Louis XVIII. was proclaimed king of France at the headquarters at Belleville. On the 15th of August, 1795, - that is to say, two months after the date of this proclamation, - a young man brought Charette a letter from the new king. This letter, written from Verona, and dated July 8, 1795, conferred on Charette the command of the royalist army.

Charette wished to reply by the same young messenger and thank the king for the honor he had done him; but the young man informed the general that he had re-entered France to stay there and fight there, and asked that the despatch he had brought might serve as a recommendation to the commander-in-chief. Charette immediately attached him to his person.

This young messenger was no other than Monsieur's former page, the Marquis de Souday.

As he withdrew to seek some rest, after doing his last sixty miles on horseback, the marquis came upon a young guard, who was five or six years older than himself, and was now standing, hat in hand, and looking at him with affectionate respect. Souday recognized the son of one of his father's farmers, with whom he had hunted as a lad with huge satisfaction; for no one could head off a boar as well or urge on the hounds after the animal was turned with such vigor.

"Hey! Jean Oullier," he cried; "is that you?"

"Myself in person, and at your service, monsieur le marquis," answered the young peasant.

"Good faith! my friend, and glad enough, too. Are you still as keen a huntsman?"

"Oh, yes, monsieur le marquis; only, just now it is other game than boars we are after."

"Never mind that. If you are willing, we'll hunt this game together as we did the other."

"That's not to be refused, but much the contrary, monsieur le marquis," returned Jean Oullier.

From that moment Jean Oullier was attached to the Marquis de Souday, just as the marquis was attached to Charette, - that is to say, that Jean Oullier was the aide-de-camp of the aide-de-camp of the commander-in-chief. Besides his talents as a huntsman he was a valuable man in other respects. In camping he was good for everything. The marquis never had to think of bed or victuals; in the worst of times he never went without a bit of bread, a glass of water, and a shake-down of straw, which in La Vendée was a luxury the commander-in-chief himself did not always enjoy.

We should be greatly tempted to follow Charette, and consequently our young hero, on one of the many adventurous expeditions undertaken by the royalist general, which won him the reputation of being the greatest partisan leader the world has seen; but history is a seductive siren, and if you imprudently obey the sign she makes you to follow her, there is no knowing where you will be led. We must simplify our tale as much as possible, and therefore we leave to others the opportunity of relating the expedition of the Comte d'Artois to Noirmoutiers and the Île Dieu, the strange conduct of the prince, who remained three weeks within sight of the French coast without landing, and the discouragement of the royalist army when it saw itself abandoned by those for whom it had fought so gallantly for more than two years.

In spite of which discouragement, however, Charette not long after won his terrible victory at Les Quatre Chemins. It was his last; for treachery from that time forth took part in the struggle. De Couëtu, Charette's right arm, his other self after the death of Jolly, was enticed into an ambush,

captured, and shot. In the last months of his life Charette could not take a single step without his adversary, whoever he was, Hoche or Travot, being instantly informed of it.

Surrounded by the republican troops, hemmed in on all sides, pursued day and night, tracked from bush to bush, springing from ditch to ditch, knowing that sooner or later he was certain to be killed in some encounter, or, if taken, to be shot on the spot, – without shelter, burnt up with fever, dying of thirst, half famished, not daring to ask at the farmhouses he saw for a little water, a little bread, or a little straw, – he had only thirty-two men remaining with him, among whom were the Marquis de Souday and Jean Oullier, when, on the 25th of March, 1796, the news came that four republican columns were marching simultaneously against him.

"Very good," said he; "then it is here, on this spot, that we must fight to the death and sell our lives dearly."

The spot was La Prélinière, in the parish of Saint-Sulpice. But with thirty-two men Charette did not choose to await the enemy; he went to meet them. At La Guyonnières he met General Valentin with two hundred grenadiers and chasseurs. Charette's position was a good one, and he intrenched it. There, for three hours, he sustained the charges and fire of two hundred republicans. Twelve of his men fell around him. The Army of the Chouannerie, which was twenty-four thousand strong when M. le Comte d'Artois lay off the Île Dieu without landing, was now reduced to twenty men.

These twenty men stood firmly around their general; not one even thought of escape. To make an end of the business, General Valentin took a musket himself, and at the head of the hundred and eighty men remaining to him, he charged at the point of the bayonet.

Charette was wounded by a ball in his head, and three fingers were taken off by a sabre-cut. He was about to be captured when an Alsatian, named Pfeffer, who felt more than mere devotion to Charette, whom he worshipped, took the general's plumed hat, gave him his, and saying, "Go to the right; they'll follow me," sprang to the left himself. He was right; the republicans rushed after him savagely, while Charette sprang in the opposite direction with his fifteen remaining men.

He had almost reached the wood of La Chabotière when General Travot's column appeared. Another and more desperate fight took place, in which Charette's sole object was to get himself killed. Losing blood from three wounds, he staggered and fell. A Vendéan, named Bossard, took him on his shoulders and carried him toward the wood; but before reaching it, Bossard himself was shot down. Then another man, Laroche-Davo, succeeded him, made fifty steps, and he too fell in the ditch that separates the wood from the plain.

Then the Marquis de Souday lifted Charette in his arms, and while Jean Oullier with two shots killed two republican soldiers who were close at their heels, he carried the general into the wood, followed by the seven men still living. Once fairly within the woods, Charette recovered his senses.

"Souday," he said, "listen to my last orders."

The young man stopped.

"Put me down at the foot of that oak."

Souday hesitated to obey.

"I am still your general," said Charette, imperiously. "Obey me."

The young man, overawed, did as he was told and put down the general at the foot of the oak.

"There! now," said Charette, "listen to me. The king who made me general-in-chief must be told how his general died. Return to his Majesty Louis XVIII., and tell him all that you have seen; I demand it."

Charette spoke with such solemnity that the marquis did not dream of disobeying him.

"Go!" said Charette, "you have not a minute to spare; here come the Blues. Fly!"

As he spoke the republicans had reached the edge of the woods. Souday took the hand which Charette held out to him.

"Kiss me," said the latter.

The young man kissed him.

"That will do," said the general; "now go."

Souday cast a look at Jean Oullier.

"Are you coming?" he said.

But his follower shook his head gloomily.

"What have I to do over there, monsieur le marquis?" he said. "Whereas here-"

"Here, what?"

"I'll tell you that if we ever meet again, monsieur le marquis."

So saying, he fired two balls at the nearest republicans. They fell. One of them was an officer of rank; his men pressed round him. Jean Oullier and the marquis profited by that instant to bury themselves in the depths of the woods.

But at the end of some fifty paces Jean Oullier, finding a thick bush at hand, slipped into it like a snake, with a gesture of farewell to the Marquis de Souday.

The marquis continued his way alone.

II. THE GRATITUDE OF KINGS

The Marquis de Souday gained the banks of the Loire and found a fisherman who was willing to take him to Saint-Gildas. A frigate hove in sight, – an English frigate. For a few more louis the fisherman consented to put the marquis aboard of her. Once there, he was safe.

Two or three days later the frigate hailed a three-masted merchantman, which was heading for the Channel. She was Dutch. The marquis asked to be put aboard of her; the English captain consented. The Dutchman landed him at Rotterdam. From Rotterdam he went to Blankenbourg, a little town in the duchy of Brunswick, which Louis XVIII. had chosen for his residence.

The marquis now prepared to execute Charette's last instructions. When he reached the château Louis XVIII. was dining; this was always a sacred hour to him. The ex-page was told to wait. When dinner was over he was introduced into the king's presence.

He related the events he had seen with his own eyes, and, above all, the last catastrophe, with such eloquence that his Majesty, who was not impressionable, was enough impressed to cry out: –

"Enough, enough, marquis! Yes, the Chevalier de Charette was a brave servant; we are grateful to him."

He made the messenger a sign to retire. The marquis obeyed; but as he withdrew he heard the king say, in a sulky tone: –

"That fool of a Souday coming here and telling me such things after dinner! It is enough to upset my digestion!"

The marquis was touchy; he thought that after exposing his life for six months it was a poor reward to be called a fool by him for whom he had exposed it. One hundred louis were still in his pocket, and he left Blankenbourg that evening, saying to himself: –

"If I had known that I should be received in that way I wouldn't have taken such pains to come."

He returned to Holland, and from Holland he went to England. There began a new phase in the existence of the Marquis de Souday. He was one of those men who are moulded by circumstances, – men who are strong or weak, brave or pusillanimous, according to the surroundings among which fortune casts them. For six months he had been at the apex of that terrible Vendéan epic; his blood had stained the gorse and the moors of upper and lower Poitou; he had borne with stoical fortitude not only the ill-fortune of battle, but also the privations of that guerilla warfare, bivouacking in snow, wandering without food, without clothes, without shelter, in the boggy forests of La Vendée. Not once had he felt a regret; not a single complaint had passed his lips.

And yet, with all these antecedents, when isolated in the midst of that great city of London, where he wandered sadly regretting the excitements of war, he felt himself without courage in presence of enforced idleness, without resistance under ennui, without energy to overcome the wretchedness of exile. This man, who had bravely borne the attacks and pursuits of the infernal columns of the Blues, could not bear up against the evil suggestions which came of idleness. He sought pleasure everywhere to fill the void in his existence caused by the absence of stirring vicissitudes and the excitements of a deadly struggle.

Now such pleasures as a penniless exile could command were not of a high order; and thus it happened that, little by little, he lost his former elegance and the look and manner of gentleman as his tastes deteriorated. He drank ale and porter instead of champagne, and contented himself with the bedizened women of the Haymarket and Regent Street, – he who had chosen his first loves among the duchesses.

Soon the looseness of his principles and the pressure of his needs drove him into connections from which his reputation suffered. He accepted pleasures when he could not pay for them; his companions in debauchery were of a lower class than himself. After a time his own class of *émigrés*

turned away from him, and by the natural drift of things, the more the marquis found himself neglected by his rightful friends, the deeper he plunged into the evil ways he had now entered.

He had been leading this existence for about two years, when by chance he encountered, in an evil resort which he frequented, a young working-girl, whom one of those infamous women who infest London had enticed from her poor home and produced for the first time. In spite of the changes which ill-luck and a reckless life had produced in the marquis, the poor girl perceived the remains of a gentleman still in him. She flung herself at his feet, and implored him to save her from an infamous life, for which she was not meant, having always been good and virtuous till then.

The young girl was pretty, and the marquis offered to take her with him. She threw herself on his neck and promised him all her love and the utmost devotion. Without any thought of doing a good action the marquis defeated the speculation on Eva's beauty, – the girl was named Eva. She kept her word, poor, faithful creature that she was; the marquis was her first and last and only love.

The matter was a fortunate thing for both of them. The marquis was getting very tired of cock-fights and the acrid fumes of beer, not to speak of frays with constables and loves at street-corners. The tenderness of the young girl rested him; the possession of the pure child, white as the swans which are the emblem of Brittany, his own land, satisfied his vanity. Little by little, he changed his course of life, and though he never returned to the habits of his own class, he did adopt a life which was that of a decent man.

He went to live with Eva on the upper floor of a house in Piccadilly. She was a good workwoman, and soon found employment with a milliner. The marquis gave fencing-lessons. From that time they lived on the humble proceeds of their employments, finding great happiness in a love which had now become powerful enough to gild their poverty. Nevertheless, this love, like all things mortal, wore out in the end, though not for a long time. Happily for Eva, the emotions of the Vendéan war and the frantic excitements of London hells had used up her lover's superabundant sap; he was really an old man before his time. The day on which the marquis first perceived that his love for Eva was waning, the day when her kisses were powerless, not to satisfy him but to rouse him, habit had acquired such an influence over him that even had he sought distractions outside his home he no longer had the force or the courage to break a connection in which his selfishness still found the monotonous comforts of daily life.

The former *viveur*, whose ancestors had possessed for three centuries the power of life and death in their province, the *ex-brigand*, the aide-de-camp to the *brigand* Charette, led for a dozen years the dull, precarious, drudging life of a humble clerk, or a mechanic more humble still.

Heaven had long refrained from blessing this illegitimate marriage; but at last the prayers which Eva had never ceased to offer for twelve years were granted. The poor woman became pregnant, and gave birth to twin daughters. But alas! a few hours of the maternal joys she had so longed for were all that were granted to her. She died of puerperal fever.

Eva's tenderness for the Marquis de Souday was as deep and warm at the end of twelve years' devotion as it was in the beginning of their intercourse; yet her love, great as it was, did not prevent her from recognizing that frivolity and selfishness were at the bottom of her lover's character. Therefore she suffered in dying not only the anguish of bidding an eternal farewell to the man she had loved so deeply, but the terror of leaving the future of her children in his hands.

This loss produced impressions upon the marquis which we shall endeavor to reproduce minutely, because they seem to us to give a distinct idea of the nature of the man who is destined to play an important part in the narrative we are now undertaking.

He began by mourning his companion seriously and sincerely. He could not help doing homage to her good qualities and recognizing the happiness which he owed to her affection. Then, after his first grief had passed away, he felt something of the joy of a schoolboy when he gets out of bounds. Sooner or later his name, rank, and birth must have made it necessary for him to break the tie. The

marquis felt grateful to Providence for relieving him of a duty which would certainly have distressed him.

This satisfaction, however, was short-lived. Eva's tenderness, the continuity, if we may say so, of the care and attention she had given him, had spoilt the marquis; and those cares and attentions, now that he had suddenly lost them, seemed to him more essential to his happiness than ever. The humble chambers in which they had lived became, now that the Englishwoman's fresh, pure voice no longer enlivened them, what they were in reality, – miserable lodging-rooms; and, in like manner, when his eyes sought involuntarily the silky hair of his companion lying in golden waves upon the pillow, his bed was nothing more than a wretched pallet. Where could he now look for the soft petting, the tender attention to all his wants, with which, for twelve good years, Eva had surrounded him. When he reached this stage of his desolation the marquis admitted to himself that he could never replace them. Consequently, he began to mourn poor Eva more than ever, and when the time came for him to part with his little girls, whom he sent into Yorkshire to be nursed, he put such a rush of tenderness into his grief that the good country-woman, their foster-mother, was sincerely affected.

After thus separating from all that united him with the past, the Marquis de Souday succumbed under the burden of his solitude; he became morose and taciturn. As his religious faith was none too solid, he would probably have ended, under the deep disgust of life which now took possession of him, by jumping into the Thames, if the catastrophe of 1814 had not happened just in time to distract him from his melancholy thoughts. Re-entering France, which he had never hoped to see again, the Marquis de Souday very naturally applied to Louis XVIII., of whom he had asked nothing during his exile in return for the blood he had shed for him. But princes often seek pretexts for ingratitude, and Louis XVIII. was furnished with three against his former page: first, the tempestuous manner in which he had announced to his Majesty Charette's death, – an announcement which had in fact troubled the royal digestion; secondly, his disrespectful departure from Blankenbourg, accompanied by language even more disrespectful than the departure itself; and thirdly (this was the gravest pretext), the irregularity of his life and conduct during the emigration.

Much praise was bestowed upon the bravery and devotion of the former page; but he was, very gently, made to understand that with such scandals attaching to his name he could not expect to fulfil any public functions. The king was no longer an autocrat, they told him; he was now compelled to consider public opinion; after the late period of public immorality it was necessary to introduce a new and more rigid era of morals. How fine a thing it would be if the marquis were willing to sacrifice his own personal ambitions to the necessities of the State.

In short, they persuaded him to be satisfied with the cross of Saint-Louis, the rank and pension of a major of cavalry, and to take himself off to eat the king's bread on his estate at Souday, – the sole fragment recovered by the poor *émigré* from the wreck of the enormous fortune of his ancestors.

What was really fine about all this was that these excuses and hypocrisies did not hinder the Marquis de Souday from doing his duty, – that is, from leaving his poor castle to defend the white flag when Napoleon made his marvellous return from Elba. Napoleon fell again, and for the second time the marquis re-entered Paris with the legitimate princes. But this time, wiser than he was in 1814, he merely asked of the restored monarchy for the place of Master of Wolves to the arrondissement of Machecoul, – an office in the royal gift which, being without salary or emolument, was willingly accorded to him.

Deprived during his youth of a pleasure which in his family was an hereditary passion, the marquis now devoted himself ardently to hunting. Always unhappy in a solitary life, for which he was totally unfitted, yet growing more and more misanthropic as the result of his political disappointments, he found in this active exercise a momentary forgetfulness of his bitter memories. Thus the position of Master of Wolves, which gave him the right to roam the State forests at will, afforded him far more satisfaction than his ribbon of Saint-Louis or his commission as major of cavalry.

So the Marquis de Souday had been living for two years in the mouldy little castle we lately described, beating the woods day and night with his six dogs (the only establishment his slender means permitted), seeing his neighbors just enough to prevent them from considering him an absolute bear, and thinking as little as he could of his past wealth and his past fame, when one morning, as he was starting to explore the north end of the forest of Machecoul, he met on the road a peasant woman carrying a child three or four years old on each arm.

The marquis instantly recognized the woman and blushed as he did so. It was the nurse from Yorkshire, to whom he had regularly for the last thirty-six months neglected to pay the board of her two nurslings. The worthy woman had gone to London, and there made inquiries at the French legation. She had now reached Machecoul with the assistance of the French minister, who of course did not doubt that the Marquis de Souday would be most happy to recover his two children.

The singular part of it is that the ambassador was not entirely mistaken. The little girls reminded the marquis so vividly of his poor Eva that he was seized with genuine emotion; he kissed them with a tenderness that was not assumed, gave his gun to the Englishwoman, took his children in his arms, and returned to the castle with this unlooked-for game, to the utter stupefaction of the cook, who constituted his whole household, and who now overwhelmed him with questions as to the singular accession thus made to the family.

These questions alarmed the marquis. He was only thirty-nine years of age, and vague ideas of marriage still floated in his head; he regarded it as a duty not to let a name and house so illustrious as that of Souday come to an end in his person. Moreover, he would not have been sorry to turn over to a wife the management of his household affairs, which was odious to him. But the realization of that idea would, of course, be impossible if he kept the little girls in his house.

He saw this plainly, paid the Englishwoman handsomely, and the next day despatched her back to her own country.

During the night he had come to a resolution which, he thought, would solve all difficulties. What was that resolution? We shall now see.

III. THE TWINS

The Marquis de Souday went to bed repeating to himself the old proverb, "Night brings counsel." With that hope he fell asleep. When asleep, he dreamed.

He dreamed of his old wars in La Vendée with Charette, – of the days when he was aide-de-camp; and, more especially, he dreamed of Jean Oullier, his attendant, of whom he had never thought since the day when they left Charette dying, and parted in the wood of Chabotière.

As well as he could remember, Jean Oullier before joining Charette's army had lived in the village of La Chevrolière, near the lake of Grand-Lieu. The next morning the Marquis de Souday sent a man of Machecoul, who did his errands, on horseback with a letter, ordering him to go to La Chevrolière and ascertain if a man named Jean Oullier was still living and whether he was in the place. If he was, the messenger was to give him the letter and, if possible, bring him back with him. If he lived at a short distance the messenger was to go there. If the distance was too great he was to obtain every information as to the locality of his abode. If he was dead the messenger was to return at once and say so.

Jean Oullier was not dead; Jean Oullier was not in distant parts; Jean Oullier was in the neighborhood of La Chevrolière; in fact, Jean Oullier was in La Chevrolière itself.

Here is what had happened to him after parting with the marquis on the day of Charette's last defeat. He stayed hidden in the bush, from which he could see all and not be seen himself. He saw General Travot take Charette prisoner and treat him with all the consideration a man like General Travot would show to a man like Charette. But, apparently, that was not all that Jean Oullier expected to see, for after seeing the republicans lay Charette on a litter and carry him away, Jean Oullier still remained hidden in his bush.

It is true that an officer with a picket of twelve men remained in the wood. What were they there for?

About an hour later a Vendéan peasant passed within ten paces of Jean Oullier, having answered the challenge of the sentinel with the word "Friend," – an odd answer in the mouth of a royalist peasant to a republican soldier. The peasant next exchanged the countersign with the sentry and passed on. Then he approached the officer, who, with an expression of disgust which it is quite impossible to represent, gave him a bag that was evidently full of gold. After which the peasant disappeared, and the officer with his picket guard also departed, showing that in all probability they had only been stationed there to await the coming of the peasant.

In all probability, too, Jean Oullier had seen what he wanted to see, for he came out of his bush as he went into it, – that is to say, crawling; and getting on his feet, he tore the white cockade from his hat, and, with the careless indifference of a man who for the last three years had staked his life every day on a turn of the dice, he buried himself still deeper in the forest.

The same night he reached La Chevrolière. He went straight to his own home. On the spot where his house had stood was a blackened ruin, blackened by fire. He sat down upon a stone and wept.

In that house he had left a wife and two children.

Soon he heard a step and raised his head. A peasant passed. Jean Oullier recognized him in the darkness and called: -

"Tinguy!"

The man approached.

"Who is it calls me?" he said.

"I am Jean Oullier," replied the Chouan.

"God help you," replied Tinguy, attempting to pass on; but Jean Oullier stopped him.

"You must answer me," he said.

"Are you a man?"

"Yes."

"Then question me and I will answer."

"My father?"

"Dead."

"My wife?"

"Dead."

"My two children?"

"Dead."

"Thank you."

Jean Oullier sat down again, but he no longer wept. After a few moments he fell on his knees and prayed. It was time he did, for he was about to blaspheme. He prayed for those who were dead.

Then, restored by that deep faith that gave him hope to meet them in a better world, he bivouacked on those sad ruins.

The next day, at dawn, he began to rebuild his house, as calm and resolute as though his father were still at the plough, his wife before the fire, his children at the door. Alone, and asking no help from any one, he rebuilt his cottage.

There he lived, doing the humble work of a day laborer. If any one had counselled Jean Oullier to ask a reward from the Bourbons for doing what he, rightly or wrongly, considered his duty, that adviser ran some risk of insulting the grand simplicity of the poor peasant.

It will be readily understood that with such a nature Jean Oullier, on receiving the letter in which the marquis called him his old comrade and begged him to come to him, he did not delay his going. On the contrary, he locked the door of his house, put the key in his pocket, and then, as he lived alone and had no one to notify, he started instantly. The messenger offered him his horse, or, at any rate, to take him up behind him; but Jean Oullier shook his head.

"Thank God," he said, "my legs are good."

Then resting his hand on the horse's neck, he set the pace for the animal to take, – a gentle trot of six miles an hour. That evening Jean Oullier was at the castle. The marquis received him with visible delight. He had worried all day over the idea that Jean Oullier might be absent, or dead. It is not necessary to say that the idea of that death worried him not for Jean Oullier's sake but for his own. We have already informed our readers that the Marquis de Souday was slightly selfish.

The first thing the marquis did was to take Jean Oullier apart and confide to him the arrival of his children and his consequent embarrassment.

Jean Oullier, who had had his own two children massacred, could not understand that a father should voluntarily wish to part with his children. He nevertheless accepted the proposal made to him by the marquis to bring up the little girls till such a time as they were of age to go to school. He said he would find some good woman at La Chevrolière who would be a mother to them, – if, indeed, any one could take the place of a mother to orphaned children.

Had the twins been sickly, ugly, or disagreeable, Jean Oullier would have taken them all the same; but they were, on the contrary, so prepossessing, so pretty, so graceful, and their smiles so engaging, that the good man instantly loved them as such men do love. He declared that their fair and rosy faces and curling hair were so like those of the cherubs that surrounded the Madonna over the high altar at Grand-Lieu before it was destroyed, that he felt like kneeling to them when he saw them.

It was therefore decided that on the morrow Jean Oullier should take the children back with him to La Chevrolière.

Now it so happened that, during the time which had elapsed between the departure of the nurse and the arrival of Jean Oullier, the weather had been rainy. The marquis, confined to the castle, felt terribly bored. Feeling bored, he sent for his daughters and began to play with them. Putting one astride his neck, and perching the other on his back, he was soon galloping on all fours round the

room, like Henri of Navarre. Only, he improved on the amusement which his Majesty afforded his progeny by imitating with his mouth not only the horn of the hunter, but the barking and yelping of the whole pack of hounds. This domestic sport diverted the Marquis de Souday immensely, and it is safe to say that the little girls had never laughed so much in their lives.

Besides, the little things had been won by the tenderness and the petting their father had lavished upon them during these few hours, to appease, no doubt, the reproaches of his conscience at sending them away from him after so long a separation. The children, on their side, showed him a frantic attachment and a lively gratitude, which were not a little dangerous to the fulfilment of his plan.

In fact, when the carriage came, at eight o'clock in the morning, to the steps of the portico, and the twins perceived that they were about to be taken away, they set up cries of anguish. Bertha flung herself on her father, clasped his knees, clung to the garters of the gentleman who gave her sugar-plums and made himself such a capital horse, and twisted her little hands into them in such a manner that the poor marquis feared to bruise her wrists by trying to unclasp them.

As for Mary, she sat down on the steps and cried; but she cried with such an expression of real sorrow that Jean Oullier felt more touched by her silent grief than by the noisy despair of her sister. The marquis employed all his eloquence to persuade the little girls that by getting into the carriage, they would have more pleasure and more dainties than by staying with him; but the more he talked, the more Mary cried and the more Bertha quivered and passionately clung to him.

The marquis began to get impatient. Seeing that persuasion could do nothing, he was about to employ force when, happening to turn his eyes, he caught sight of the look on Jean Oullier's face. Two big tears were rolling down the bronzed cheeks of the peasant into the thick red whiskers which framed his face. Those tears acted both as a prayer to the marquis and as a reproach to the father. Monsieur de Souday made a sign to Jean Oullier to unharness the horse; and while Bertha, understanding the sign, danced with joy on the portico, he whispered in the farmer's ear: -

"You can start to-morrow."

As the day was very fine, the marquis desired to utilize the presence of Jean Oullier by taking him on a hunt; with which intent he carried him off to his own bedroom to help him on with his sporting-clothes. The peasant was much struck by the frightful disorder of the little room; and the marquis continued his confidences with bitter complaints of his female servitor, who, he said, might be good enough among her pots and pans, but was odiously careless as to all other household comforts, particularly those that concerned his clothes. On this occasion it was ten minutes before he could find a waistcoat that was not widowed of its buttons, or a pair of breeches not afflicted with a rent that made them more or less indecent. However, he was dressed at last.

Wolf-master though he was, the marquis, as we have said, was too poor to allow himself the luxury of a huntsman, and he led his little pack himself. Therefore, having the double duty of keeping the hounds from getting at fault, and firing at the game, it was seldom that the poor marquis, passionate sportsman that he was, did not come home at night tired out.

With Jean Oullier it was quite another thing. The vigorous peasant, in the flower of his age, sprang through the forest with the agility of a squirrel; he bounded over bushes when it took too long to go round them, and, thanks to his muscles of steel, he never was behind the dogs by a length. On two or three occasions he supported them with such vigor that the boar they were pursuing, recognizing the fact that flight would not shake off his enemies, ended by turning and standing at bay in a thicket, where the marquis had the happiness of killing him at one blow, - a thing that had never yet happened to him.

The marquis went home light-hearted and joyful, thanking Jean Oullier for the delightful day he owed to him. During dinner he was in fine good-humor, and invented new games to keep the little girls as gay as himself.

At night, when he went to his room, the marquis found Jean Oullier sitting cross-legged in a corner, like a Turk or a tailor. Before him was a mound of garments, and in his hand he held a pair of old velvet breeches which he was darning vigorously.

"What the devil are you doing there?" demanded the marquis.

"The winter is cold in this level country, especially when the wind is from the sea; and after I get home my legs will be cold at the very thought of a norther blowing on yours through these rents," replied Jean Oullier, showing his master a tear which went from knee to belt in the breeches he was mending.

"Ha! so you're a tailor, too, are you?" cried the marquis.

"Alas!" said Jean Oullier, "one has to be a little of everything when one lives alone as I have done these twenty years. Besides, an old soldier is never at a loss."

"I like that!" said the marquis; "pray, am not I a soldier, too?"

"No; you were an officer, and that's not the same thing."

The Marquis de Souday looked at Jean Oullier admiringly. Then he went to bed and to sleep, and snored away, without in the least interrupting the work of his old Chouan. In the middle of the night he woke up. Jean Oullier was still at work. The mound of garments had not perceptibly diminished.

"But you can never finish them, even if you work till daylight, my poor Jean," said the marquis.

"I'm afraid not."

"Then go to bed now, old comrade; you needn't start till you have mended up all my old rags, and we can have another hunt to-morrow."

IV.

HOW JEAN OULLIER, COMING TO SEE THE MARQUIS FOR AN HOUR, WOULD BE THERE STILL IF THEY HAD NOT BOTH BEEN IN THEIR GRAVE THESE TEN YEARS

The next morning, before starting for the hunt, it occurred to the marquis to kiss his children. He therefore went up to their room, and was not a little astonished to find that the indefatigable Jean Oullier had preceded him, and was washing and brushing the little girls with the conscientious determination of a good governess. The poor fellow, to whom the occupation recalled his own lost young ones, seemed to be taking deep satisfaction in the work. The marquis changed his admiration into respect.

For eight days the hunts continued without interruption, each finer and more fruitful than the last. During those eight days Jean Oullier, huntsman by day, steward by night, not only revived and restored his master's wardrobe, but he actually found time to put the house in order from top to bottom.

The marquis, far from urging his departure, now thought with horror of parting from so valuable a servitor. From morning till night, and sometimes from night till morning, he turned over in his mind which of the Chouan's qualities was most serviceable to him. Jean Oullier had the scent of a hound to follow game, and the eye of an Indian to discover its trail by the bend of the reeds or the dew on the grass. He could even tell, on the dry and stony roads about Machecoul, Bourgneuf, and Aigrefeuille, the age and sex of a boar, when the trail was imperceptible to other eyes. No huntsman on horseback had ever followed up the hounds like Jean Oullier on his long and vigorous legs. Moreover, on the days when rest was actually necessary for the little pack of hounds, he was unequalled for discovering the places where snipe abounded, and taking his master to the spot.

"Damn marriage!" cried the marquis to himself, occasionally, when he seemed to be thinking of quite other things. "Why do I want to row in that boat when I have seen so many good fellows come to grief in it? Heavens and earth! I'm not so young a man-almost forty; I haven't any illusions; I don't expect to captivate a woman by my personal attractions. I can't expect to do more than tempt some old dowager with my three thousand francs a year, – half of which dies with me. I should probably get a scolding, fussy, nagging wife, who might interfere with my hunting, which that good Jean manages so well; and I am sure she will never keep the house in such order as he does. Still," he added, straightening himself up, and swaying the upper part of his body, "is this a time to let the old races, the supporters of monarchy, die out? Wouldn't it be very pleasant to see my son restore the glory of my house? Besides, what would be thought of me, – who am known to have had no wife, no legitimate wife, – what will my neighbors say if I take the two little girls to live with me?"

When these reflections came, which they ordinarily did on rainy days, when he could not be off on his favorite pastime, they cast the Marquis de Souday into painful perplexity, from which he wriggled, as do all undecided temperaments and weak natures, – men, in short, who never know how to adopt a course, – by making a provisional arrangement.

At the time when our story opens, in 1831, Mary and Bertha were seventeen, and the provisional arrangement still lasted; although, strange as it may seem, the Marquis de Souday had not yet positively decided to keep his daughters with him.

Jean Oullier, who had hung the key of his house at La Chevrolière to a nail, had never, in fourteen years, had the least idea of taking it down. He had waited patiently till his master gave him the order to go home. But as, ever since his arrival, the château had been neat and clean; as the marquis had never once missed a button; as the hunting-boots were always properly greased; as the guns were kept with all the care of the best armory at Nantes; as Jean Oullier, by means of certain coercive

proceedings, of which he learned the secret from a former comrade of the "brigand army," had, little by little, brought the cook not to vent her ill-humor on her master; as the hounds were always in good condition, shiny of coat, neither fat nor thin, and able to bear a long chase of eight or ten hours, ending mostly in a kill; as the chatter and the pretty ways of his children and their expansive affection varied the monotony of his existence; as his talks and gossip with Jean Oullier on the stirring incidents of the old war, now passed into a tradition (it was thirty-six years distant), enlivened his dull hours and the long evenings and the rainy days, – the marquis, finding once more the good care, the quiet ease, the tranquil happiness he had formerly enjoyed with Eva, with the additional and intoxicating joys of hunting, – the marquis, we say, put off from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, deciding on the separation.

As for Jean Oullier, he had his own reasons for not provoking a decision. He was not only a brave man, but he was a good one. As we have said, he at once took a liking to Bertha and Mary; this liking, in that poor heart deprived of its own children, soon became tender affection, and the tenderness fanaticism. He did not at first perceive very clearly the distinction the marquis seemed to make between their position and that of other children whom he might have by a legitimate marriage to perpetuate his name. In Poitou, when a man gets a worthy girl into trouble he knows of no other reparation than to marry her. Jean Oullier thought it natural, inasmuch as his master could not legitimize the connection with the mother, that he should at least not conceal the paternity which Eva in dying had bequeathed to him. Therefore, after two months' sojourn at the castle, having made these reflections, weighed them in his mind, and ratified them in his heart, the Chouan would have received an order to take the children away with very ill grace; and his respect for Monsieur de Souday would not have prevented him from expressing himself bluffly on the subject.

Fortunately, the marquis did not betray to his dependant the tergiversations of his mind; so that Jean Oullier did really regard the provisional arrangement as definitive, and he believed that the marquis considered the presence of his daughters at the castle as their right and also as his own bounden duty.

At the moment when we issue from these preliminaries, Bertha and Mary were, as we have said, between seventeen and eighteen years of age. The purity of race in their paternal ancestors had done marvels when strengthened with the vigorous Saxon blood of the plebeian mother. Eva's children were now two splendid young women, with refined and delicate features, slender and elegant shapes, and with great distinction and nobility in their air and manner. They were as much alike as twins are apt to be; only Bertha was dark, like her father, and Mary was fair, like her mother.

Unfortunately, the education of these beautiful young creatures, while developing to the utmost their physical advantages, did not sufficiently concern itself with the needs of their sex. It was impossible that it should be otherwise, living from day to day beside their father, with his natural carelessness and his determination to enjoy the present and let the future take care of itself.

Jean Oullier was the only tutor of Eva's children, as he was formerly their only nurse. The worthy Chouan taught them all he knew himself, – namely, to read, write, cipher, and pray with tender and devout fervor to God and the Virgin; also to roam the woods, scale the rocks, thread the tangle of holly, reeds, and briers without fatigue, without fear or weakness of any kind; to hit a bird on the wing, a squirrel on the leap, and to ride bareback those intractable horses of Mellerault, almost as wild on their plains and moors as the horses of the gauchos on the pampas.

The Marquis de Souday had seen all this without attempting to give any other direction to the education of his daughters, and without having even the idea of counteracting the taste they were forming for these manly exercises. The worthy man was only too delighted to have such valiant comrades in his favorite amusement, uniting, as they did, with their respectful tenderness toward him a gayety, dash, and ardor for the chase, which doubled his own pleasure from the time they were old enough to share it.

And yet, in strict justice, we must say that the marquis added one ingredient of his own to Jean Oullier's instructions. When Bertha and Mary were fourteen years old, which was the period when they first followed their father into the forest, their childish games, which had hitherto made the old castle so lively in the evenings, began to lose attraction. So, to fill the void he was beginning to feel, the Marquis de Souday taught Bertha and Mary how to play whist.

On the other hand, the two children had themselves completed mentally, as far as they could, the education Jean Oullier had so vigorously developed physically. Playing hide-and-seek through the castle, they came upon a room which, in all probability, had not been opened for thirty years. It was the library. There they found a thousand volumes, or something near that number.

Each followed her own bent in the choice of books. Mary, the gentle, sentimental Mary, preferred novels; the turbulent and determined Bertha, history. Then they mingled their reading in a common fund; Mary told Paul and Virginia and Amadis to Bertha, and Bertha told Mèzeray and Velly to Mary. The result of such desultory reading was, of course, that the two young girls grew up with many false notions about real life and the habits and requirements of a world they had never seen, and had, in truth, never heard of.

At the time they made their first communion the vicar of Machecoul, who loved them for their piety and the goodness of their heart, did risk a few remarks to their father on the peculiar existence such a bringing-up must produce; but his friendly remarks made no impression on the selfish indifference of the Marquis de Souday. The education we have described was continued, and such habits and ways were the result that, thanks to their already false position, poor Bertha and her sister acquired a very bad reputation throughout the neighborhood.

The fact was, the Marquis de Souday was surrounded by little newly made nobles, who envied him his truly illustrious name, and asked nothing better than to fling back upon him the contempt with which his ancestors had probably treated theirs. So when they saw him keep in his own house, and call his daughters, the children of an illegitimate union, they began to trumpet forth the evils of his life in London; they exaggerated his wrong-doing and made poor Eva (saved by a miracle from a life of degradation) a common woman of the town. Consequently, little by little, the country squires of Beauvoir, Saint-Leger, Bourgneuf, Saint-Philbert, and Grand-Lieu, avoided the marquis, under pretence that he degraded the nobility, – a matter about which, taking into account the mushroom character of their own rank, they were very good to concern themselves.

But soon it was not the men only who disapproved of the Marquis de Souday's conduct. The beauty of the twin sisters roused the enmity of the mothers and daughters in a circuit of thirty miles, and that was infinitely more alarming. If Bertha and Mary had been ugly the hearts of these charitable ladies and young ladies, naturally inclined to Christian mercy, would perhaps have forgiven the poor devil of a father for his improper paternity; but it was impossible not to be shocked at the sight of two such spurious creatures, crushing by their distinction, their nobility, and their personal charm, the well-born young ladies of the neighborhood. Such insolent superiority deserved neither mercy nor compassion.

The indignation against the poor girls was so general that even if they had never given any cause for gossip or calumny, gossip and calumny would have swept their wings over them. Imagine, therefore, what was likely to happen, and did actually happen, when the masculine and eccentric habits of the sisters were fully known! One universal hue-and-cry of reprobation arose from the department of the Loire-Inférieure and echoed through those of La Vendée and the Maine-et-Loire; and if it had not been for the sea, which bounds the coast of the Loire-Inférieure, that reprobation would, undoubtedly, have spread as far to the west as it did to the south and east. All classes, bourgeois and nobles, city-folk and country-folk, had their say about it. Young men, who had hardly seen Mary and Bertha, and did not know them, spoke of the daughters of the Marquis de Souday with meaning smiles, expressive of hopes, if not of memories. Dowagers crossed themselves on pronouncing their names, and nurses threatened little children when they were naughty with goblin tales of them.

The most indulgent confined themselves to attributing to the twins the three virtues of Harlequin, usually regarded as the attributes of the disciples of Saint-Hubert, – namely, love, gambling, and wine. Others, however, declared that the little castle of Souday was every night the scene of orgies such as chronicles of the regency alone could show. A few imaginative persons went further, and declared that one of its ruined towers-abandoned to the innocent loves of a flock of pigeons-was a repetition of the famous Tour de Nesle, of licentious and homicidal memory.

In short, so much was said about Bertha and Mary that, no matter what had been and then was the purity of their lives and the innocence of their actions, they became an object of horror to the society of the whole region. Through the servants of private houses, through the workmen employed by the bourgeoisie, this hatred and horror of society filtered down among the peasantry, so that the whole population in smocks and wooden shoes (if we except a few old blind men and helpless women to whom the twins had been kind) echoed far and wide the absurd stories invented by the big-wigs. There was not a woodman, not a laborer in Machecoul, not a farmer in Saint-Philbert and Aigrefeuille that did not feel himself degraded in raising his hat to them.

The peasantry at last gave Bertha and Mary a nickname; and this nickname, starting from the lower classes, was adopted by acclamation among the upper, as a just characterization of the lawless habits and appetites attributed to the young girls. They were called the she-wolves (a term, as we all know, equivalent to *sluts*), – the she-wolves of Machecoul.

V. A LITTER OF WOLVES

The Marquis de Souday was utterly indifferent to all these signs of public animadversion; in fact, he seemed to ignore their existence. When he observed that his neighbors no longer returned the few visits that from time to time he felt obliged to pay to them, he rubbed his hands with satisfaction at being released from social duties, which he hated and only performed when constrained and forced to do so either by his daughters or by Jean Oullier.

Every now and then some whisper of the calumnies that were circulating about Bertha and Mary reached him; but he was so happy with his factotum, his daughters, and his hounds, that he felt he should be compromising the tranquillity he enjoyed if he took the slightest notice of such absurd reports. Accordingly, he continued to course the hares daily and hunt the boar on grand occasions, and play whist nightly with the two poor calumniated ones.

Jean Oullier was far from being as philosophical as his master; but then it must be said that in his position he heard much more than the marquis did. His affection for the two young girls had now become fanaticism; he spent his life in watching them, whether they sat, softly smiling, in the salon of the château, or whether, bending forward on their horses' necks, with sparkling eyes and animated faces, they galloped at his side, with their long locks floating in the wind from beneath the broad brims of their felt hats and undulating feathers. Seeing them so brave and capable, and at the same time so good and tender to their father and himself, his heart swelled with pride and happiness; he felt himself as having a share in the development of these two admirable creatures, and he wondered why all the world should not be willing to kneel down to them.

Consequently, the first persons who risked telling him of the rumors current in the neighborhood were so sharply rebuked for it that they were frightened and warned others; but Bertha and Mary's true father needed no words to inform him what was secretly believed of the two dear objects of his love. From a smile, a glance, a gesture, a sign, he guessed the malicious thoughts of all with a sagacity that made him miserable. The contempt that poor and rich made no effort to disguise affected him deeply. If he had allowed himself to follow his impulses he would have picked a quarrel with every contemptuous face, and corrected some by knocking them down, and others by a pitched battle. But his good sense told him that Bertha and Mary needed another sort of support, and that blows given or received would prove absolutely nothing in their defence. Besides, he dreaded-and this was, in fact, his greatest fear-that the result of some quarrel, if he provoked it, might be that the young girls would be made aware of the public feeling against them.

Poor Jean Oullier therefore bowed his head before this cruelly unjust condemnation, and tears and fervent prayers to God, the supreme redressor of the cruelties and injustices of men, alone bore testimony to his grief; but in his heart he fell into a state of profound misanthropy. Seeing none about him but the enemies of his two dear children, how could he help hating mankind? And he prepared himself for the day when some future revolution might enable him to return evil for evil.

The revolution of 1830 had just occurred, but it had not given Jean Oullier the opportunity he craved to put these evil designs into execution. Nevertheless, as rioting and disturbances were not yet altogether quelled in the streets of Paris, and might still be communicated to the provinces, he watched and waited.

On a fine morning in September, 1831, the Marquis de Souday, his daughters, Jean Oullier, and the pack-which, though frequently renewed since we made its acquaintance, had not increased in numbers-were hunting in the forest of Machecoul.

It was an occasion impatiently awaited by the marquis, who for the last three months had been expecting grand sport from it, – the object being to capture a litter of young wolves, which Jean Oullier had discovered before their eyes were opened, and which he had, being a faithful and knowing

hunter to a Master of Wolves, watched over and cared for for several months. This last statement may demand some explanations to those of our readers who are not familiar with the noble art of venery.

When the Duc de Biron (beheaded, in 1602, by order of Henri IV.) was a youth, he said to his father at one of the sieges of the religious wars, "Give me fifty cavalry; there's a detachment of two hundred men, sallying out to forage. I can kill every one of them, and the town must surrender." "Suppose it does, what then?" "What then? Why, I say the town will surrender." "Yes; and the king will have no further need of us. We must continue *necessary*, you ninny!" The two hundred foragers were not killed. The town was not taken, and Biron and his son continued "necessary;" that is to say, being necessary they retained the favor and the wages of the king.

Well, it is with wolves as it was with those foragers spared by the Duc de Biron. If there were no longer any wolves how could there be a Wolf-master? Therefore we must forgive Jean Oullier, who was, as we may say, a corporal of wolves, for showing some tender care for the nurslings and not slaying them, them and their mother, with the stern rigor he would have shown to an elderly wolf of the masculine sex.

But that is not all. Hunting an old wolf in the open is impracticable, and in a battue it is monotonous and tiresome; but to hunt a young wolf six or seven months old is easy, agreeable, and amusing. So, in order to procure this charming sport for his master, Jean Oullier, on finding the litter, had taken good care not to disturb or frighten the mother; he concerned himself not at all for the loss of sundry of the neighbors' sheep, which she would of course inevitably provide for her little ones. He had paid the latter several visits, with touching solicitude, during their infancy, to make sure that no one had laid a disrespectful hand upon them, and he rejoiced with great joy when he one day found the den depopulated and knew that the mother-wolf had taken off her cubs on some excursion.

The day had now come when, as Jean Oullier judged, they were in fit condition for what was wanted of them. He therefore, on this grand occasion, hedged them in to an open part of the forest, and loosed the six dogs upon one of them.

The poor devil of a cub, not knowing what all this trumpeting and barking meant, lost his head and instantly quitted the covert, where he left his mother and brothers and where he still had a chance to save his skin. He took unadvisedly to another open, and there, after running for half an hour in a circuit like a hare, he became very tired from an exertion to which he was not accustomed, and feeling his big paws swelling and stiffening he sat down artlessly on his tail and waited.

He did not have to wait long before he found out what was wanted of him, for Domino, the leading hound, a Vendéan, with a rough gray coat, came up almost immediately and broke his back with one crunch of his jaw.

Jean Oullier called in his dogs, took them back to the starting-point, and ten minutes later a brother of the deceased was afoot, with the hounds at his heels. This one however, with more sense than the other, did not leave the covert, and various sorties and charges, made sometimes by the other cubs and sometimes by the mother-wolf, who offered herself voluntarily to the dogs, delayed for a time his killing. But Jean Oullier knew his business too well to let such actions compromise success. As soon as the cub began to head in a straight line with the gait of an old wolf, he called off his dogs, took them to where the cub had broken, and put them on the scent.

Pressed too closely by his pursuers, the poor wolfling tried to double. He returned upon his steps, and left the wood with such innocent ignorance that he came plump upon the marquis and his daughters. Surprised, and losing his head, he tried to slip between the legs of the horses; but M. de Souday, leaning from his saddle, caught him by the tail, and flung him to the dogs, who had followed his doubling.

These successful kills immensely delighted the marquis, who did not choose to end the matter here. He discussed with Jean Oullier whether it was best to call in the dogs and attack at the same

place, or whether, as the rest of the cubs were evidently afoot, it would not be best to let the hounds into the wood pell-mell to find as they pleased.

But the mother-wolf, knowing probably that they would soon be after the rest of her progeny, crossed the road not ten steps distant from the dogs, while the marquis and Jean Oullier were arguing. The moment the little pack, who had not been re-coupled, saw the animal, they gave one cry, and, wild with excitement, rushed upon her traces. Calls, shouts, whips, nothing could hold them, nothing stop them. Jean Oullier made play with his legs, and the marquis and his daughters put their horses to a gallop for the same purpose; but the hounds had something else than a timid, ignorant cub to deal with. Before them was a bold, vigorous, enterprising animal, running confidently, as if sure of her haven, in a straight line, indifferent to valleys, rocks, mountains, or water-courses, without fear, without haste, trotting along at an even pace, sometimes surrounded by the dogs, whom she mastered by the power of an oblique look and the snapping of her formidable jaws.

The wolf, after crossing three fourths of the forest, broke out to the plain as though she were making for the forest of Grand'Land. Jean Oullier had kept up, thanks to the elasticity of his legs, and was now only three or four hundred steps behind the dogs. The marquis and his daughters, forced by the ditches to follow the curve of the paths, were left behind. But when they reached the edge of the woods and had ridden up the slope which overlooks the little village of Marne, they saw, over a mile ahead of them, between Machecoul and La Brillardière, in the midst of the gorse which covers the ground near those villages and La Jacquellerie, Jean Oullier, his dogs, and his wolf, still in the same relative positions, and following a straight line at the same gait.

The success of the first two chases and the rapidity of the ride stirred the blood of the Marquis de Souday.

"Morbleu!" he cried; "I'd give six years of life to be at this moment between Saint-Étienne de Mermorte and La Guimarière and send a ball into that vixen of a wolf."

"She is making for the forest of Grand'Land," said Mary.

"Yes," said Bertha; "but she will certainly come back to the den, so long as the cubs have not left it. She won't forsake her own wood long."

"I think it would be better to go back to the den," said Mary. "Don't you remember, papa, that last year we followed a wolf which led us a chase of ten hours, and all for nothing; and we had to go home with our horses blown, the dogs lame, and all the mortification of a dead failure?"

"Ta, ta, ta!" cried the marquis; "that wolf wasn't a she-wolf. You can go back, if you like, mademoiselle; as for me, I shall follow the hounds. Corbleu! it shall never be said I wasn't in at the death."

"We shall go where you go, papa," cried both girls together.

"Very good; forward, then!" cried the marquis, vigorously spurring his horse, and galloping down the slope. The way he took was stony and furrowed with the deep ruts of which Lower Poitou keeps up the tradition to this day. The horses stumbled repeatedly, and would soon have been down if they had not been held up firmly; it was evidently impossible to reach the forest of Grand'Land before the game.

Monsieur de Souday, better mounted than his daughters, and able to spur his beast more vigorously, had gained some rods upon them. Annoyed by the roughness of the road, he turned his horse suddenly into an open field beside it, and made off across the plain, without giving notice to his daughters. Bertha and Mary, thinking that they were still following their father, continued their way along the dangerous road.

In about fifteen minutes from the time they lost sight of their father they came to a place where the road was deeply sunken between two slopes, at the top of which were rows of trees, the branches meeting and interlacing above their heads. There they stopped suddenly, thinking that they heard at a little distance the well-known barking of their dogs. Almost at the same moment a gun went off close beside them, and a large hare, with bloody hanging ears, ran from the hedge and along the road

before them, while loud cries of "Follow! follow! tally-ho! Tally-ho!" came from the field above the narrow roadway.¹

The sisters thought they had met the hunt of some of their neighbors, and were about to discreetly disappear, when from the hole in the hedge through which the hare had forced her way, came Rustaud, one of their father's dogs, yelping loudly, and after Rustaud, Faraud, Bellaude, Domino, and Fanfare, one after another, all in pursuit of the wretched hare, as if they had chased that day no higher game.

The tail of the last dog was scarcely through the opening before a human face appeared there. This face belonged to a pale, frightened-looking young man, with touzled head and haggard eyes, who made desperate efforts to bring his body after his head through the narrow passage, calling out, as he struggled with the thorns and briars, "Tally-ho! tally-ho!" in the same voice Bertha and Mary had heard about five minutes earlier.

¹ The English cry "tally-ho" comes from the French cry *taillis au*, – "to the copse," or "covert."

VI. THE WOUNDED HARE

Among the hedges of Lower Poitou (constructed, like the Breton hedges, with bent and twisted branches interlacing each other) it is no reason, because a hare and six hounds have passed through, that the opening they make should be considered in the light of a *porte-cochère*; on the contrary, the luckless young man was held fast as though his neck were in the collar of the guillotine. In vain he pushed and struggled violently, and tore his hands and face till both were bloody; it was impossible for him to advance one inch.

And yet he did not lose courage; he fought on with might and main, until suddenly two peals of girlish laughter arrested his struggles. He looked round, and saw the two riders bending over the pommels of their saddles, and making no effort either to restrain their amusement or conceal the cause of it.

Ashamed of being laughed at by two such pretty girls (he was only twenty), and perceiving how really grotesque his appearance must be, the young man tried to withdraw his head from the hole; but it was written above that that unlucky hedge should be fatal to him either way. The thorns hooked themselves into his clothing and the branches into his game-bag, so that it was literally impossible for him to get back. There he was, caught in the hedge as if in a trap; and this second misfortune only increased the convulsive hilarity of the two spectators.

The luckless youth no longer used mere vigorous energy to free himself from the thicket. His struggles became furious, almost frenzied, and in this last and desperate attempt his face assumed an expression of such pitiable despair that Mary, the gentle one, felt touched.

"We ought not to laugh, Bertha," she said; "don't you see it hurts him?"

"Yes, I see," replied Bertha; "but how can we help it? I can't stop myself."

Then, still laughing, she jumped off her horse and ran to the poor fellow to help him.

"Monsieur," she said, "I think a little assistance may be useful in getting you out of that hedge. Pray accept the help my sister and I are most ready to offer."

But the girl's laughter had pricked the vanity of the youth even more than the thorns had pricked his body; so that no matter how courteously Bertha worded her proposal, it did not make the unfortunate captive forget the hilarity of which he had been the object. So he kept silence; and, with the air of a man resolved to get out of his troubles without the help of any one, he made a last and still more strenuous effort.

He lifted himself by his wrists and endeavored to propel himself forward by the sort of diagonal motion with the lower part of his body that all animals of the snake genus employ. Unluckily, in making this movement his forehead came in contact with the branch of a wild apple-tree, which the shears of the farmer who made the hedge had sharpened like the end of a pike. This branch cut and scraped the skin like a well-tempered razor; and the young man, feeling himself seriously wounded, gave a cry as the blood, spurting freely, covered his whole face.

When the sisters saw the accident, of which they were involuntarily the cause, they ran to the young man, seized him by the shoulders, and uniting their efforts, with a vigor and strength not to be met with among ordinary women, they managed to drag him through the hedge and seat him on the bank. Mary, who could not know that the wound was really a slight one, and only judged by appearances, became very pale and trembling, as for Bertha, less impressionable than her sister, she did not lose her head for a single moment.

"Run to that brook," she said to Mary, "and wet your handkerchief, so that I may wash off the blood that is blinding the poor fellow."

When Mary had done as she was told and had returned with the moistened handkerchief, she asked the young man in her gentle way: -

"Do you suffer much, monsieur?"

"Excuse me, mademoiselle," replied the young man, "but I have so much on my mind at this moment that I do not know whether I suffer most on the inside or the outside of my head." Then suddenly bursting into sobs, with difficulty restrained till then, he cried out, "Ah! the good God has punished me for disobeying mamma!"

Although the youth who spoke was certainly young, – for, as we have said, he was only twenty, – there was something so infantine in his accent and so ludicrously out of keeping with his height and his huntsman's dress in his words, that the sisters, in spite of their compassion for his wound, could not restrain another peal of laughter.

The poor lad cast a look of entreaty and reproach, upon them, while two big tears rolled down his cheeks; then he tore from his head, impatiently, the handkerchief wet with water from the brook, which Mary had laid upon his forehead.

"Don't do that!" said Bertha.

"Let me alone!" he cried. "I don't choose to receive attentions I have to pay for in ridicule. I am sorry now I did not follow my first idea and run away, at the risk of getting a worse wound."

"Yes; but as you had the sense not to do so," said Mary, "have sense enough now to let me put that bandage back upon your head."

Picking up the handkerchief she went to him with such a kindly expression of interest that he, shaking his head, not in sign of refusal but of utter depression, said: –

"Do as you please, mademoiselle."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Bertha, who had not lost a single expression on the countenance of the young man; "for a hunter you seem to me rather easily upset, monsieur."

"In the first place, mademoiselle, I am not a hunter, and after what has just happened to me I don't wish ever to become one."

"I beg your pardon," said Bertha, in the same laughing tone which had already provoked the youth, "but judging by the fury with which you assaulted the briars and thorns, and especially by the eagerness with which you urged on our dogs, I think I had every right to at least imagine you a hunter."

"Oh, no, mademoiselle; I am not a hunter. I was carried away by a momentary excitement, which I cannot now at all understand. At present I am perfectly cool, and I know how right my mother was to call the amusement of hunting, which consists in finding pleasure and gratified vanity in the agony and death of a poor, defenceless, dumb animal, ridiculous and degrading."

"Take care, monsieur!" cried Bertha. "To us, who are ridiculous and degraded enough to like that amusement, you seem a good deal like the fox in the fable."

Just then Mary, who had gone a second time to the brook to wet her handkerchief, was about to re-bandage the young man's forehead. But he pushed her away from him angrily.

"In Heaven's name, mademoiselle," he cried, "spare me your attentions! Don't you hear how your sister continues to laugh at me?"

"No, let me tie this on, I beg of you," said Mary.

But he, not allowing himself to be persuaded by the sweetness of her voice, rose to his knees, with the evident intention of escaping altogether. Such obstinacy, which was more that of a child than of a man, exasperated the irascible Bertha; and her irritation, though inspired by the purest feelings of humanity, was none the less expressed in rather too energetic a way for one of her sex.

"Confound it!" she cried, as her father might have done under similar circumstances, "the provoking little fellow won't hear reason! Put on the bandage, Mary; I'll hold his hands, and we'll see if he stirs then."

And Bertha, seizing the young man's wrists with a muscular strength which paralyzed all his efforts to get away, managed to facilitate Mary's task so that she was able to bind the wound and tie the handkerchief, which she did with a nicety that might have done honor to a pupil of Dupuytren or Jobert.

"Now, monsieur," said Bertha, "you are in a fit state to go home, and get away from us, as you are longing to do, without so much as thank you. You can go."

But in spite of this permission and his restored liberty, the youth did not budge. He seemed surprised and also deeply humiliated at having fallen into the hands of two such strong women; his eyes turned from Bertha to Mary and from Mary to Bertha, and still he was unable to find a word to say. At last, seeing no other way out of his embarrassment, he hid his face in his hands.

"Oh!" said Mary, kindly; "do you feel ill?"

The youth made no answer. Bertha gently moved his hands from his face, and finding that he was really weeping, she became as compassionate and gentle as her sister.

"You are more hurt than you seemed to be; is it the pain that makes you cry?" she said. "If so, get on my horse or my sister's, and we will take you home."

But to this the young man eagerly made a sign in the negative.

"Come," said Bertha, "enough of this childish nonsense! We have affronted you; but how could we know that the skin of a girl was under your hunting-jacket. Nevertheless, we were wrong; we admit it, and we beg your pardon. You may not think we do so in a proper manner; but remember the situation, and say to yourself that sincerity is all you can expect from two girls so neglected by Heaven as to spend their time in the ridiculous amusement which your mother unfortunately disapproves. Now, do you mean to be unforgiving?"

"No, mademoiselle," replied the youth; "it is only with myself that I am annoyed."

"Why so?"

"I can hardly tell you. Perhaps it is that I am ashamed to be weaker than you, – I, a man; perhaps, too, I am all upset at the thought of going home. What can I say to my mother to explain this wound?"

The two girls looked at each other. Women as they were, they would have cared little for such a trifle; but they refrained from laughing, strong as the temptation was, seeing by this time the extreme nervous susceptibility of the young man.

"Well, then," said Bertha, "if you are no longer angry with us, let us shake hands and part friends."

And she held out her hand as a man might have done. The youth was about to reply with a like gesture, when Mary made a sign to call their attention, by lifting her finger in the air.

"Hush!" said Bertha, listening as her sister did, one hand half extended toward that of the young man.

In the distance, but coming rapidly nearer, they heard the sharp, eager, prolonged yelping of hounds, – of hounds that were scenting game. It was the Marquis de Souday's pack, still in pursuit of the wounded hare, which had now doubled on them. Bertha pounced on the young man's gun, the right barrel of which was still loaded. He made a gesture as if to stop a dangerous imprudence, but the young girl only smiled at him. She ran the ramrod hastily down the loaded barrel, as all prudent hunters do when about to use a gun they have not loaded themselves, and finding that the weapon was in proper condition, she advanced a few steps, handling the gun with an ease which showed she was perfectly familiar with the use of it.

Almost at the same moment the hare darted from the hedge, evidently with the intention of returning the way it came; then, perceiving the three persons who stood there, it made a rapid somersault and doubled back. Quick as the movement was Bertha had time to aim; she fired, and the animal, shot dead, rolled down the bank into the middle of the road.

Mary had, meantime, advanced like her sister to shake hands with the young man, and the two stood looking on at what was happening with their hands clasped. Bertha picked up the hare, and returning to the unknown young man who still held Mary's hand, she said, giving him the game: –

"There, monsieur, there's an excuse for you."

"How so?" he asked.

"You can tell your mother that the hare ran between your legs and your gun went off without your knowledge; and you can swear, as you did just now, that it shall never happen again. The hare will plead extenuating circumstances."

The young man shook his head in a hopeless way.

"No," he said, "I should never dare tell my mother I have disobeyed her."

"Has she positively forbidden you to hunt?"

"Oh, dear, yes!"

"Then you are poaching!" said Bertha; "you begin where others finish. Well, you must admit you have a vocation for it."

"Don't joke, mademoiselle. You have been so good to me I don't want to get angry with you; I should only be twice as unhappy then."

"You have but one alternative, monsieur," said Mary; "either tell a lie-which you will not do, neither do we advise it-or acknowledge the whole truth. Believe me, whatever your mother may think of your amusing yourself in defiance of her wishes, your frankness will disarm her. Besides, it is not such a great crime to kill a hare."

"All the same I should never dare to tell her."

"Is she so terrible as all that?" inquired Bertha.

"No, mademoiselle; she is very kind and tender. She indulges all my wishes and foresees my fancies; but on this one matter of guns she is resolute. It is natural she should be," added the young man, sighing; "my father was killed in hunting."

"Then, monsieur," said Bertha, gravely, "our levity has been all the more misplaced, and we regret it extremely. I hope you will forget it and remember only our regrets."

"I shall only remember, mademoiselle, the kind care you have bestowed upon me; and I, in turn, hope you will forget my silly fears and foolish susceptibility."

"No, no, we shall remember them," said Mary, "to prevent ourselves from ever hurting the feelings of others as we hurt yours; for see what the consequences have been!"

While Mary was speaking Bertha had mounted her horse. Again the youth held out his hand, though timidly, to Mary. She touched it with the points of her fingers and sprang into her own saddle. Then, calling in the dogs, who came at the sound of their voices, the sisters gave rein to their horses and rode rapidly away.

The youth stood looking after them, silent and motionless, until they had disappeared round a curve of the road. Then he dropped his head on his breast and continued thoughtful. We will remain a while with this new personage, for we ought to become fully acquainted with him.

VII. MONSIEUR MICHEL

What had just happened produced such a powerful impression on the young man's mind that after the girls had disappeared he fancied it must have been a dream.

He was, in fact, at that period of life when even those who are destined to become later the most practical of men pay tribute to the romantic; and this meeting with two young girls, so different from those he was in the habit of seeing, transported him at once into the fantastic world of youth's first dreams, where the imagination wanders as it pleases among the castles built by fairy hands, which topple over beside the path of life as we advance along it.

We do not mean to say, however, that our young man had got as far as falling in love with either of the two amazons, but he felt himself spurred to the keenest curiosity; for this strange mixture of distinction, beauty, elegance of manner, and cavalier virility struck him as extraordinary. He determined to see these girls again, or, at any rate, to find out who they were.

Heaven seemed disposed to satisfy his curiosity at once. He had hardly started on his way home, and was not more than a few hundred steps from the spot where the young girls had left him, when he met an individual in leather gaiters, with a gun and a hunting-horn slung over his blouse and across his shoulders, and a whip in his hand. The man walked fast and seemed much out of temper. He was evidently the huntsman who belonged to the young women. Accordingly the youth, assuming his most gracious and smiling manner, accosted him.

"Friend," he said, "you are searching for two young ladies, I think, – one on a brown-bay horse, the other on a roan mare."

"In the first place, I am not your friend, for I don't know you," said the man, gruffly. "I am looking for my dogs, which some fool turned off the scent of a wolf they were after and put on that of a hare, which he missed killing, like the blunderer that he is."

The young man bit his lips. The man in the blouse, whom our readers no doubt recognize as Jean Oullier, went on to say: -

"Yes, I saw it all from the heights of Benaste, which I was coming down when our game doubled, and I'd willingly have given the premium which the Marquis de Souday allows me on the hunt if I could have had that lubber within reach of my whip."

The youth to whom he spoke thought it advisable to make no sign that he was concerned in the affair; he listened, therefore, to Jean Oullier's allocution as if it were absolutely of no interest to him, and said merely: -

"Oh! do you belong to the Marquis de Souday?"

Jean Oullier looked askance at his blundering questioner.

"I belong to myself," said the old Chouan. "I lead the hounds of the Marquis de Souday, as much for my pleasure as for his."

"Dear me!" said the young man, as if speaking to himself, "Mamma never told me the marquis was married."

"Well then," interrupted Oullier, "I tell it you now, my good sir; and if you have anything to say against it, I'll tell you something else, too. Do you hear me?"

Having said these words in a threatening tone, which his hearer seemed not to understand, Jean Oullier, without further concerning himself as to what the other might be thinking, turned on his heel and walked off rapidly in the direction of Machecoul.

Left to himself the young man took a few more steps in the path he had taken when the young girls left him; then turning to the left he went into a field. In that field was a peasant ploughing. The peasant was a man about forty years of age, who was distinguishable from the peasants of Poitou by a shrewd and sly expression of countenance peculiarly Norman. He was ruddy in complexion, his eyes

were keen and piercing; but his constant effort seemed to be to diminish, or rather to conceal, their keenness by perpetually blinking them. He probably thought that proceeding gave a look of stupidity, or at least of good humor, which checked the distrust of others; but his artful mouth, with its corners sharply defined, and curling up like those of an antique Pan, betrayed, in spite of him, that he was one of those wonderful products that usually follow the crossing of Mans and Norman blood.

Although the young man made directly for him, he did not stop his work; he knew the cost of the effort to his horses to start the plough when its motion was arrested in that tough and clayey soil. He therefore continued his way as though he were alone, and it was only at the end of the furrow, when he had turned his team and adjusted his instrument to continue the work, that he showed a willingness to enter into conversation while his horses recovered their wind.

"Well," he said, in a tone that was almost familiar, "have you had good sport, Monsieur Michel?"

The youth, without replying, took the game bag from his shoulder, and dropped it at the peasant's feet. The latter, seeing through the thick netting the yellowish, silky fur of a hare, exclaimed:

"Ho, ho! pretty good for your first attempt, Monsieur Michel."

So saying, he took the animal from the bag, and examined it knowingly, pressing its belly as if he were not very sure of the precautions so inexperienced a sportsman as Monsieur Michel might have taken.

"Ha! *sapredienne!*" he cried; "the fellow is worth three francs and a half, if he is a farthing. You made a fine shot there, Monsieur Michel; do you know it? You must have found out by this time that it is more amusing to be out with a gun than reading a book, as you are always doing."

"No, upon my word, Courtin, I prefer my books to your gun," said the youth.

"Well, perhaps you are right," replied Courtin, whose face expressed some slight disappointment. "If your late father had thought as you do it might have been better for him, too. But all the same, if I had means and were not a poor devil obliged to work for a living twelve hours out of the twenty-four, I would spend more than my nights in hunting."

"Do you still hunt at night, Courtin?"

"Yes, Monsieur Michel, now and then, for amusement."

"The gendarmes will catch you some night."

"Pooh! they're do-nothings, those fellows; they don't get up early enough in the morning to catch me." Then, allowing his face to express all its natural cunning, he added, "I know a thing more than they, Monsieur Michel; there are not two Courtins in this part of the country. The only way to prevent me from poaching is to make me a game-keeper like Jean Oullier."

Monsieur Michel made no reply to this indirect proposal, and as he was totally ignorant of who Jean Oullier might be, he did not notice the last part of the sentence any more than the beginning of it.

"Here is your gun, Courtin," he said, holding out the weapon. "Thank you for your idea of lending it to me; you meant well, and it isn't your fault if I don't find as much amusement in hunting as other people do."

"You must try again, Monsieur Michel, and get a liking for it; the best dogs are those that show points last. I've heard men who will eat thirty dozen oysters at a sitting say they couldn't even bear to look at them till they were past twenty. Leave the château with a book, as you did this morning; Madame la baronne won't suspect anything. You'll find me at work about here, and my gun is always at your service. Besides, if I am not too busy, I'll beat the bushes for you. Meantime I'll put the tool in the rack."

Courtin's "rack" was merely the hedge which divided his field from his neighbors. He slipped the gun into it and drew the twigs and briers together, so as to hide the place from a passing eye, and also to keep his piece from rain and moisture, – two things, however, to which a true poacher pays little attention, so long as he still has candle-ends and a bit of linen.

"Courtin," said Monsieur Michel, endeavoring to assume a tone of indifference, "did you know that the Marquis de Souday was married?"

"No, that I didn't," said the peasant.

"And has two daughters?" continued Michel.

Courtin, who was still finishing his work of concealment by twisting a few rebellious branches, raised his head quickly and looked at the young man with such fixedness that although the latter had only asked his question out of vague curiosity he blushed to the very whites of his eyes.

"Have you met the she-wolves?" asked Courtin. "I thought I heard that old Chouan's horn."

"Whom do you call the she-wolves?" said Michel.

"I call those bastard girls of the Marquis de Souday the she-wolves," replied Courtin.

"Do you mean to say you call those two young girls by such a name?"

"Damn it! that's what they're called in all the country round. But you've just come from Paris, and so you don't know. Where did you meet the sluts?"

The coarseness with which Courtin spoke of the young ladies frightened the timid youth so much that, without exactly knowing why, he lied.

"I have not met them," he said.

By the tone of his answer Courtin doubted his words.

"More's the pity for you," he answered. "They are pretty slips of girls, good to see and pleasant to hug." Then, looking at Michel and blinking as usual, he added, "They say those girls are a little too fond of fun; but that's the kind a jolly fellow wants, doesn't he, Monsieur Michel?"

Without understanding the cause of the sensation, Michel felt his heart more and more oppressed as the brutal peasant spoke with insulting approval of the two charming amazons he had just left under a strong impression of gratitude and admiration. His annoyance was reflected in his face.

Courtin no longer doubted that Michel had met the she-wolves, as he called them, and the youth's denial made the man's suspicions as to what the truth might be go far beyond reality. He was certain that the marquis had been within an hour or two close to La Logerie, and it seemed quite probable that Monsieur Michel should have seen Bertha and Mary, who almost always accompanied their father when he hunted. Perhaps the young man might have done more than see them, perhaps he had spoken with them; and, thanks to the estimation in which the sisters were held, a conversation with the Demoiselles de Souday would only mean the beginning of an intrigue.

Going from one deduction to another, Courtin, who was logical in mind, concluded that his young master had reached that point. We say "his young master," because Courtin tilled a farm which belonged to Monsieur Michel. The work of a farmer, however, did not please him; what he coveted was the place of keeper or bailiff to the mother and son. For this reason it was that the artful peasant tried by every possible means to establish a strong relation of some kind between himself and the young man.

He had evidently just failed of his object in persuading Michel to disobey his mother in the matter of hunting. To share the secrets of a love affair now struck him as a part very likely to serve his interests and his low ambitions. The moment he saw the cloud on Monsieur Michel's brow he felt he had made a mistake in echoing the current calumnies, and he looked about him to recover his ground.

"However," he said, with well-assumed kindness, "there are always plenty of people to find more fault, especially in the matter of girls, than there is any occasion for. Mademoiselle Bertha and Mademoiselle Mary—"

"Mary and Bertha! Are those their names?" asked the young man, eagerly.

"Mary and Bertha, yes. Mademoiselle Bertha is the dark one, and Mademoiselle Mary the fair one."

He looked at Monsieur Michel with all the acuteness of which his eyes were capable, and he thought the young man slightly blushed as he named the fair one.

"Well, as I was saying," resumed the persistent peasant, "Mademoiselle Mary and Mademoiselle Bertha are both fond of hunting and hounds and horses; but that doesn't prevent them from being very good girls. Why, the late vicar of Benaste, who was a fine sportsman, didn't say mass any the worse because his dog was in the vestry and his gun behind the altar."

"The fact is," said Monsieur Michel, forgetting that he gave the lie to his own words, – "the fact is, they both look sweet and good, particularly Mademoiselle Mary."

"They are sweet and good, Monsieur Michel. Last year, during that damp, hot weather, when the fever came up from the marshes and so many poor devils died of it, who do you think nursed the sick without shirking, when even some of the doctors and the veterinaries deserted their posts? Why, the she-wolves, as they call them. They didn't do their charity in church, no! They went to the sick people's houses; they sowed alms and reaped blessings. Though the rich hate them, and the nobles are jealous of them, I make bold to say that the poor folk are on their side."

"Why should any one think ill of them?" asked Michel.

"Who knows? Nobody gives any real reason. Men, don't you see, Monsieur Michel, are like birds. When one is sick and in the dumps all the others come about him and pluck out his feathers. What is really true in all this is that people of their own rank fling mud and stones at those poor young ladies. For instance, there's your mamma, who is so good and kind, – isn't she, Monsieur Michel? Well, if you were to ask her she would tell you, like all the rest of the world, 'They are bad girls.'"

But, in spite of this change of front on Courtin's part, Monsieur Michel did not seem disposed to enter into the subject farther. As for Courtin himself, he thought enough had been said to pave the way for future confidences. As Monsieur Michel seemed ready to leave him, he started his horses and accompanied him to the end of the field. He noticed, as they went along, that the young man's eyes were often turned on the sombre masses of the Machecoul forest.

VIII. THE BARONNE DE LA LOGERIE

Courtin was respectfully lowering for his young master the bars which divided his field from the road when a woman's voice, calling Michel, was heard beyond the hedge. The young man stopped short and trembled at the sound.

At the same moment the owner of the voice appeared on the other side of the hedge fence which separated Courtin's field from that of his neighbor. This person, this lady, may have been forty to forty-five years of age. We must try to *explain* her to the reader.

Her face was insignificant, and without other character than an air of haughtiness which contrasted with her otherwise common appearance. She was short and stout; she wore a silk dress much too handsome for the fields, and a gray cambric hat, the floating ends of which fell upon her forehead and neck. The rest of her apparel was so choice that she might have been paying a visit in the Chaussée-d'Antin or the faubourg Saint-Honoré. This was, apparently, the person of whose reproaches the young man stood so much in awe.

"What!" she exclaimed, "you here, Michel? Really, my son, you are very inconsiderate, and you show very little regard for your mother. The bell has been ringing more than an hour to call you in to dinner. You know how I dislike to be kept waiting, and how particular I am that our meals should be regular; and here I find you tranquilly talking to a peasant."

Michel began to stammer an excuse; but, almost at the same instant his mother's eye beheld what Courtin had either not noticed or had not chosen to remark upon, – namely, that the young man's head was bound up with a handkerchief, and that the handkerchief had blood-stains upon it, which his straw hat, although its brim was wide, did not effectually conceal.

"Good God!" she cried, raising a voice, which in its ordinary key was much too high. "You are wounded! What has happened to you? Speak, unfortunate boy! don't you see that I am dying of anxiety?"

Climbing the fence with an impatience, and, above all, an agility which could scarcely have been expected of one of her age and corpulence, the mother of the youth came up to him, and before he could prevent her, took the hat and the handkerchief from his head.

The wound, thus disturbed by the tearing away of the bandage, began to bleed again. Monsieur Michel, as Courtin called him, unprepared for the explanation he so much dreaded, and which was now forced upon him suddenly, stood silent and confused, unable to reply. Courtin came to his aid. The wily peasant saw at once that the youth, fearing to tell his mother that he had disobeyed her, was also unwilling to tell a lie. As he himself had no scruples on that point, he resolutely burdened his conscience with the sin that, in his innocence, Michel dared not commit.

"Oh! Madame la baronne need not be anxious; it is nothing, absolutely nothing."

"But I wish to know how it happened. Answer for him yourself, Courtin, if monsieur is determined to keep silence."

The young man was still dumb.

"It is easily told, Madame la baronne," replied Courtin. "I had a bundle of branches I took off last autumn; it was so heavy I couldn't lift it on to my shoulders alone, and Monsieur Michel had the kindness to help me. One branch of the cursed thing got loose and scratched him on the forehead, as you see."

"Scratch! that's more than a scratch! you came near putting his eye out. Another time, Maître Courtin, get your equals to load your fagots; do you hear me? It was a very improper proceeding in itself, besides nearly maiming my son."

Courtin humbly bowed his head, as if recognizing the enormity of his offence; but that did not prevent him from giving the hare, which lay near the game-bag, a vigorous kick, which threw it out of sight under the hedge.

"Come, Monsieur Michel," said the baroness, who seemed appeased by the peasant's submissiveness, "you must go and see the doctor about that wound." Then turning back, after she had taken a few steps, she added, "By the bye, Courtin, you have not paid your mid-summer rent, and yet your lease expires at Easter. Remember that. I am determined not to keep tenants who are not regular in their payments."

Courtin's expression of countenance was more humble than ever; but it changed when the mother, getting over the fence with less agility than before, left the son free to whisper to Courtin: -

"I'll be here to-morrow."

In spite of the threat just made to him, Courtin seized the handle of his plough with more gayety than usually belonged to his disposition, and started upon a new furrow, while his betters returned to the château. For the rest of the day's work he enlivened his horses by singing to them "La Parisienne," a patriotic song then much in vogue.

While Courtin sings the above-mentioned hymn, much to the satisfaction of his steeds, let us say a few words as to the Michel family. You have seen the son, my dear readers, and you have seen the mother. The mother was the widow of one of those government purveyors who had made, at the cost of the State, rapid and considerable fortunes out of the Imperial armies; the soldiers nicknamed them "Rice-bread-salt."

The family name of this purveyor was Michel. He came originally from the department of Mayenne, and was the son of a peasant and the nephew of a village schoolmaster. The latter, by adding a few notions of arithmetic to the reading and writing he imparted to him gratuitously, did actually decide his nephew's future career.

Taken by the first draft, in 1794, Michel the peasant joined the 22d brigade with very little enthusiasm. This man, who later became a distinguished accountant, had already calculated his chances of being killed and of becoming a general. The result of his calculation did not altogether satisfy him, and he therefore, with much adroitness, made the most of his fine handwriting (also due to his uncle, the schoolmaster) to get a place as clerk in the quartermaster's department. He felt as much satisfaction in obtaining that position as another man would have felt at promotion.

It was there, at the base of supplies, that Michel, the father, went through the campaigns of 1792 and 1793. Toward the middle of the latter year General Rossignol, who was sent to either pacify or exterminate La Vendée, having accidentally come across Michel, the clerk, in one of the offices, and hearing from him that he was a native of those regions and that all his friends were in the Vendéan ranks, bethought himself of utilizing this providential circumstance. He gave Michel an indefinite furlough, and sent him home with no other instructions than to take service among the Chouans and do for him, from time to time, what Monsieur de Maurepas did for His Majesty Louis XV., - that is to say, give him the *news of the day*. Michel, who found great pecuniary advantages in this commission, fulfilled it with scrupulous fidelity, not only for General Rossignol but for all his successors.

This anecdotal correspondence was at its height, when General Travot was sent to La Vendée. We all know the result of his operations; they were the subject of the opening chapters of this book. Here is a recapitulation of them: the Vendéan army defeated, Jolly killed, Couëtu enticed into an ambush and taken by a traitor whose name has never been known, Charette made prisoner in the woods of La Chabotière and shot in the market-place of Nantes.

What part did Michel play in the successive vicissitudes of that terrible drama? We may find an answer to that question later; it is certain that soon after the last bloody episodes Michel, still recommended for his beautiful handwriting and his infallible arithmetic, entered, as clerk, the office of a very celebrated army contractor.

There he made rapid progress, for in 1805 we find him contracting on his own account to supply forage to the army of Germany. In 1806 his shoes and gaiters took an active part in the heroic campaign of Prussia. In 1809 he obtained the entire victualling of the army that entered Spain. In 1810 he married the only daughter of another contractor and doubled his fortune with her dowry.

Besides all this, he changed his name, – or rather lengthened it, – which was, for those whose names were too short, the great ambition of that period. This is how the coveted addition was managed.

The father of Monsieur Michel's wife was named Baptiste Durand. He came from the little village of La Logerie, and to distinguish him from another Durand who often crossed his path, he called himself Durand de la Logerie. At any rate, that was the pretext he gave. His daughter was educated at one of the best schools in Paris, where she was registered on her arrival as Stéphanie Durand de la Logerie. Once married to this daughter of his brother contractor, Monsieur Michel thought that his name would look better if his wife's name were added to it. He accordingly became Monsieur Michel de la Logerie.

Finally, at the Restoration, a title of the Holy Roman Empire, bought for cash, enabled him to call himself the Baron Michel de la Logerie, and to take his place, once for all, in the financial and territorial aristocracy of the day.

A few years after the return of the Bourbons, – that is to say, about 1819 or 1820, – Baron Michel de la Logerie lost his father-in-law, Monsieur Durand de la Logerie. The latter left to his daughter, and consequently to her husband, his estate at La Logerie, standing, as the details given in preceding chapters will have told the reader, about fifteen miles from the forest of Machecoul. The Baron Michel de la Logerie, like the good landlord and seigneur that he was, went to take possession of his estate and show himself to his vassals. He was a man of sense; he wanted to get into the Chamber. He could do that only by election, and his election depended on the popularity he might gain in the department of the Lower Loire.

He was born a peasant; he had lived twenty-five years of his life among peasants (barring the two or three years he was in the quartermaster's office), and he knew exactly how to deal with peasants. In the first place, he had to make them forgive his prosperity. He made himself what is called "the good prince," found a few old comrades of the Vendéan days, shook hands with them, spoke with tears in his eyes of the deaths of poor Monsieur Jolly and dear Monsieur Couëtu and the worthy Monsieur Charette. He informed himself about the needs of the village, which he had never before visited, had a bridge built to open important communication between the department of the Lower Loire and that of La Vendée, repaired three county roads and rebuilt a church, endowed an orphan asylum and a home for old men, received so many benedictions, and found such pleasure in playing this patriarchal part that he expressed the intention of living only six months of the year in Paris and the other six at his Château de la Logerie.

Yielding, however, to the entreaties of his wife, who, being unable to understand the violent passion for country life which seemed to have come over him, wrote letter after letter from Paris to hasten his return, he yielded, we say, to her so far as to promise to return on the following Monday. Sunday was to be devoted to a grand battue of wolves in the woods of La Pauvrière and the forest of Grand'Lande, which were infested by those beasts. It was, in fact, another philanthropic effort on the part of Baron Michel de la Logerie.

At the battue Baron Michel still continued to play his part of a rich, good fellow. He provided refreshments for all, ordered two barrels of wine to be taken on handcarts after the trail, that every one might drink who would; he ordered a positive banquet for the whole party to be ready at an inn on their return, refused the post of honor at the battue, expressed the wish to be treated as the humblest huntsman, and his ill-luck in drawing lots having bestowed upon him the worst place of all, bore his misfortune with a good-humor that delighted everybody.

The battue was splendid. From every covert the beasts came; on all sides guns resounded with such rapidity that the scene resembled a little war. Bodies of wolves and boars were piled up beside the handcarts bearing the wine-barrels, not to speak of contraband game, such as hares and squirrels, which were killed in this battue, as at other battues, under the head of *vermin*, and carefully hidden away, to be fetched during the night.

The intoxication of success was such that the hero of the day was forgotten. It was not until after the last beating-up was over that Baron Michel was missed. Inquiries were made. No one had seen him since the morning; in fact, not since he had drawn the lot which gave him the worst place at the extreme end of the hunt. On making this discovery, it was supposed that finding his chance of amusement very slight, and being solicitous for the entertainment of his guests, he had gone back to the little town of Légé, where the feast was to be given.

But when the huntsmen arrived at Légé they found that the baron was not there. Most of them being tired and hungry sat down to the supper table without him; but a few-five or six-others, feeling uneasy, returned to the woods of La Pauvrière with torches and lanterns and began to search for him.

At the end of two hours' fruitless effort, he was found dead in the ditch of the second covert they had drawn. He was shot through the heart.

This death caused great excitement and many rumors. The police of Nantes investigated it. The huntsman whose place was directly below that of the baron was arrested. He declared that, although he was distant only one hundred and fifty steps from the baron, a corner of the wood concealed them from each other, and he had seen and heard nothing. It was also proved that this man's gun had not been fired that day; moreover, from the place where he stood he could only have hit Baron Michel on the right, whereas the latter had, as a matter of fact, been shot on the left.

The inquiry, therefore, went no farther. The death of the ex-contractor was attributed to accident; it was supposed that a stray ball had struck him (as sometimes happens when game is driven), without evil intention on the part of whoever fired it. And yet, in spite of this explanation, a vague rumor got about of some accomplished revenge. It was said-but said in the lowest whisper, as if each tuft of gorse still concealed the gun of a Chouan-it was said that a former soldier of Jolly or Couëtu or Charette had made the unfortunate purveyor expiate the betrayal and death of those illustrious leaders; but there were too many persons interested in the secret to let it ever be openly asserted.

The Baronne Michel de la Logerie was left a widow, with one son. She was one of those women of negative virtues of which the world is full. Of vices she did not possess a spark; of passions she was so far ignorant of their very name. Harnessed at seventeen to the marriage plough, she had plodded along in the conjugal furrow without swerving to the right nor yet to the left, and never so much as asking herself if there were any other road. The idea had never crossed her mind that a woman could revolt against the goad. Relieved of the yoke, she was frightened by her liberty, and instinctively looked about her for new chains. These chains religion gave her; and then, like all narrow minds, she took to vegetating in false, exaggerated, and, at the same time, conscientious devotion.

Madame la Baronne Michel sincerely believed herself a saint; she went regularly to church, kept all the fasts, and was faithful to all the injunctions of the Church. Had any one told her that she sinned seven times a day she would have been greatly astonished. Yet nothing was more true. It is certain that if the humility of Madame la Baronne de la Logerie had been dissected she would have been found at every hour of the day to disobey the precepts of the Saviour of men; for (little ground as she had for it) her pride of rank amounted to mania. We have seen how the sly peasant Courtin, who called the son Monsieur Michel, never failed to give the mother her title of baroness.

Naturally, Madame de la Logerie held the world and the epoch in holy horror; she never read a police report in her newspaper without accusing both (the world and the epoch) of the blackest immorality. To hear her, one would suppose the Iron age dated from 1800. Her utmost care was therefore directed to save her son from the contagion of the ideas of the day by bringing him up at a distance from the world and all its dangers. Never would she listen to the idea of his entering any

sort of public school; even those of the Jesuits were dangerous in her eyes, from the readiness of the good fathers to accommodate themselves to the social obligations of the young men confided to their care. Though the heir of all the Michels received some lessons from masters, which, so far as arts and sciences go, were indispensable to the education of a young man it was always in presence of the mother and on a plan approved by her; for she alone directed the course of ideas and instruction, especially on the moral side, which were given to her son.

A strong infusion of intelligence, which by great good luck nature had placed in the youth's brain, was needed to bring him safe and sound out of the torture to which she had subjected him for over ten years. He did come through it, as we have seen, though feeble and undecided, and with nothing of the strength and resolution which should characterize a man, – the representative of vigor, decision, and intellect.

IX. GALON-D'OR AND ALLÉGRO

As Michel had foreseen and feared, his mother scolded him vigorously. She was not duped by Courtin's tale; the wound on her son's forehead was by no means a scratch made by a thorn. Ignorant of what interest her son could have in concealing the matter from her, and quite convinced that even if she questioned him she should not get at the truth, she contented herself by fixing her eyes steadily from time to time on the mysterious wound, and shaking her head with a sigh and a scowl of the maternal forehead.

During the whole dinner Michel was ill at ease, lowering his eyes and scarcely eating; but it must be said that his mother's incessant examination was not the only thing that troubled him. Hovering between his lowered eyelids and his mother's suspecting eyes were two forms, two visions. These visions were the twin shadows of Bertha and of Mary.

Michel thought of Bertha with some slight irritation. Who was this Amazon who handled a gun like a trained huntsman, who bandaged wounds like a surgeon, and who, when she found her patient refractory, twisted his wrists with her white and womanly hands as Jean Oullier might have done with his hard and calloused ones?

But on the other hand, how charming was Mary, with her fine blond hair and her beautiful blue eyes! how sweet her voice, how persuasive its accents! With what gentleness she had touched his wound, washed off the blood, and bound the bandage! Michel scarcely regretted the wound, for without it there was no reason why the young ladies should have spoken to him or, indeed, have taken any notice of him.

It was true that his mother's displeasure and the doubts he had raised in her mind were really the more serious matter; but he persuaded himself that her anger would soon pass off, whereas the thing that would not pass was the impression left on his heart during the few seconds when he held Mary's hand clasped closely in his own. All hearts when they begin to love and yet are not aware of it crave solitude; and for this reason no sooner was dinner over than, profiting by a moment when his mother was discoursing with a servant, he left the room, not hearing or not heeding the words with which she called after him.

And yet those words were important. Madame de la Logerie forbade her son to go near the village of Saint-Christophe-du-Ligneron, where, as she had learned from a servant, a bad fever was raging. She at once put the château under quarantine, and forbade that any one from the infected village should approach it. The order was enforced immediately in the case of a young girl who came to ask assistance of the baroness for her father, just attacked by the fever.

If Michel's mind had not been so pre-occupied he would undoubtedly have paid attention to his mother's words, for the sick man was his foster-father, a farmer named Tinguy, and the girl who had come to ask help was his foster-sister, Rosine, for whom he had the greatest affection. But at this moment his thoughts were all rushing toward Souday, and more especially to that charming creature who bore the name of Mary.

He buried himself in the remotest woodland of the park, taking with him a book as an excuse; but though he read the book attentively till he reached the edge of the forest he would have been puzzled to tell you the name of it had you asked him. Once hidden from his mother's eyes he sat down on a bench and reflected.

What was he reflecting about? Easy to answer. He was thinking how he could contrive to see Mary and her sister again. Chance had thrown them together once, but chance had taken her time about it, for he had been over six months in the neighborhood. If it pleased chance to be another six months without giving the young baron a second meeting with his new friends the time would be too long for the present state of his heart.

On the other hand, to open communications with the château de Souday himself was hardly feasible. There had never been any sympathy between the Marquis de Souday, an *émigré* of 1790, and the Baron de la Logerie, a noble of the Empire. Besides, Jean Oullier, in the few words he had exchanged with him, had shown plainly there was no disposition to make his acquaintance.

But the young girls, they who had shown him such interest, masterful in Bertha, gentle in Mary, how could he reach the young girls? This indeed was difficult, for though they hunted two or three times a week, they were always in company of their father and Jean Oullier.

Michel resolved to read all the novels in the library of the château, hoping to discover from them some ingenious method which, as he began to fear, his own mind, limited to its own inspirations, could never furnish. At this stage of his reflections a touch was laid upon his shoulder; looking round with a quiver he saw Courtin; the farmer's face expressed a satisfaction he did not take any pains to conceal.

"Beg pardon, excuse me, Monsieur Michel," said the man; "seeing you as still as a milestone, I thought it was your statue instead of yourself."

"Well, you see it is I, Courtin."

"And I'm glad of it, Monsieur Michel; I was anxious to hear what passed between you and Madame la baronne."

"She scolded me a little."

"Oh! I was sure of that. Did you tell her anything about the hare?"

"I took good care not to."

"Or the wolves?"

"What wolves?" asked the young man not ill-pleased to bring the conversation to this point.

"The she-wolves of Machecoul; I told you that was the nickname for the young ladies at Souday."

"Of course I did not tell her; you know that, Courtin. I don't think the Souday hounds and those of La Logerie can hunt together."

"In any case," replied Courtin, in the sneering tone which, in spite of his best efforts, he was sometimes unable to conceal, "if your hounds won't hunt with the Souday pack you, as it seems, can hunt with theirs."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Look!" pulling toward him and, as it were, bringing on the stage two coupled hounds which he held in a leash.

"What are they?" asked the young baron.

"They? Why, Galon-d'Or and Allégro, to be sure."

"I don't know who Galon-d'Or and Allégro are."

"The dogs of that brigand Jean Oullier."

"Why did you take his dogs?"

"I didn't take them; I simply put them in the pound."

"By what right?"

"By two rights: land-owner's rights, and mayor's rights."

Courtin was mayor of the village of La Logerie, which contained about a score of houses, and he was very proud of the title.

"Please explain those rights, Courtin."

"Well, in the first place, Monsieur Michel, I confiscate them as mayor because they hunt at an illegal season."

"I did not know there was an illegal season for hunting wolves; besides as Monsieur de Souday is Master of wolves—"

"That's very true; as Master of wolves he can hunt wolves in the forest of Machecoul, but not on the plain. Besides, as you know yourself," continued Courtin, with a sneering smile, "as you saw

yourself, he was not hunting a wolf at all, but a hare-and moreover, that hare was shot by one of his own *cubs*."

The young man was on the point of telling Courtin that the word *cub* applied to the Demoiselles de Souday was offensive to him, and of requesting him not to use it again, but he dared not make so firm a remonstrance.

"It was Mademoiselle Bertha who killed it, Courtin," he said, "but I had previously wounded it; so I am the guilty person."

"Pshaw! what do you mean by that? Would you have fired on the hare if the hounds were not already coursing it? No, of course not. It is the fault of the dogs that you fired, and that Mademoiselle Bertha killed the game; and it is therefore the dogs that I punish as mayor for pursuing hares under pretence of hunting wolves. But that's not all; after punishing them as mayor I punish them as proprietor. Do you suppose I gave Monsieur le marquis' dogs the right to hunt over my land?"

"Your land, Courtin!" said Michel, laughing; "you are a trifle mistaken; it was over my land, or rather my mother's, that they were trespassing."

"That's no matter, Monsieur le baron, inasmuch as I farm it. You must remember that we are no longer in 1789, when the great lords had a right to ride with their hounds over the harvests of the poor peasants and trample everything down without paying for it; no, no, no, indeed! this is the year 1832, Monsieur Michel; every man is master of the soil he lives on, and game belongs to him who supports it. The hare coursed by the dogs of the marquis is my hare, for it has fed on the wheat in the fields I hire from Madame la baronne, and it is I alone who have the right to eat that hare which you wounded and the she-wolf killed."

Michel made an impatient movement which Courtin detected out of the corner of his eye; but the youth did not dare to further express his displeasure.

"There is one thing that surprises me," he said, "and that is why those dogs that are straining so at the leash ever allowed you to catch them."

"Oh!" said Courtin, "that did not give me any trouble. After I left you and Madame la baronne at the bars, I came back and found these gentlemen at dinner."

"At dinner?"

"Yes, in the hedge, where I left the hare; they found it and they were dining. It seems they are not properly fed at the château de Souday. Just see the state my hare is in."

So saying, Courtin took from the huge pocket of his jacket the hindquarters of the hare, which formed the incriminating proof of the misdemeanor; the head and shoulders were eaten off.

"And to think," said Courtin, "that they did it in just that minute of time while I was with you and madame! Ah! you scamps, you'll have to help me kill a good many to make me forget that."

"Courtin, let me tell you something," said the young baron.

"Tell away, don't be backward, Monsieur Michel."

"It is that as you are a mayor you ought to respect the laws."

"Laws! I wear them on my heart. Liberty! Public order! Don't you know those words are posted over the door of the mayor's office, Monsieur Michel?"

"Well, so much the more reason why I should tell you that what you are doing is not legal, and threatens liberty and public order."

"What!" exclaimed Courtin. "Shall the hounds of those she-wolves hunt over my land at a prohibited season, and I not be allowed to put them in the pound?"

"They were not disturbing public order, Courtin; they were simply injuring private interests; you have the right to lodge a complaint against them, but not to put them in the pound."

"Oh! that's too round-about a way; if hounds are to be allowed to run where they like and we can only lodge complaints against them, then it isn't men who have liberty, but dogs."

"Courtin," said the youth, with, a touch of the assumption observable in men who get a smattering of the Code, "you make the mistake that a great many persons make; you confound liberty with independence; independence is the liberty of men who are not free, my friend."

"Then what is liberty, Monsieur Michel?"

"Liberty, my dear Courtin, is the sacrifice that each man makes of his personal independence for the good of all. It is from the general fund of independence that each man draws his liberty; we are free, Courtin, but not independent."

"Oh, as for me," said Courtin, "I don't know anything about all that. I am a mayor and the holder of land; and I have captured the best hounds of the Marquis de Souday's pack, Galon-d'Or and Allégro, and I shall not give them up. Let him come after them, and when he does I shall ask him what he has been doing in certain meetings at Torfou and Montaigu."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I know what I mean."

"Yes, but I don't."

"There is no reason why you should know; you are not a mayor."

"No, but I am an inhabitant of the place and I have an interest in knowing what happens."

"As for that, it is easy to see what is happening; these people are conspiring again."

"What people?"

"Why, the nobles! the-but I'd better hold my tongue, though you are not exactly their style of nobility, you."

Michel reddened to the whites of his eyes.

"You say the nobles are conspiring, Courtin?"

"If not, why do they have these secret meetings at night. If they meet in the daytime, the lazy fellows, to eat and drink, that's all well enough; the law allows it and there's nothing to be said. But when they meet at night it is for no good end, you may be sure. In any case they had better look out; I've got my eye upon them, and I'm the mayor; I may not have the right to put the dogs in the pound, but I have the right to put the men in prison; I know the Code plain enough as to that."

"And you say Monsieur de Souday frequents those meetings?"

"Goodness! do you suppose he doesn't? – an old Chouan and a former aide-de-camp of Charette like him! Let him come and claim his dogs; yes, let him come! and I'll send him to Nantes, him and his cubs; they shall be made to explain what they are about, roaming the woods as they do at night."

"But," exclaimed Michel, with an eagerness there was no mistaking, "you told me yourself, Courtin, that if they went about at night it was to help the poor sick people."

Courtin stepped back a pace and pointing his finger at his young master he said with his sneering laugh: -

"Ha! ha! I've caught you."

"Me!" said the young man, coloring, "how have you caught me?"

"Well, they've caught you."

"Caught me!"

"Yes, yes, yes! And I don't blame you either; whatever else these young ladies may be, I must say they are pretty. Come, you needn't blush that way; you are not just out of a seminary; you are neither a priest, nor a deacon, nor a vicar; you are a handsome lad of twenty. Go ahead, Monsieur Michel; they'll have very poor taste if they don't like you when you like them."

"But, my dear Courtin," said Michel, "even supposing what you say were true, which it is not, I don't know these young ladies; I don't know the marquis. I can't go and call there just because I have happened to meet those young girls once on horseback."

"Oh, yes, I understand," said Courtin, in his jeering way; "they haven't a penny, but they've fine manners. You want a pretext, an excuse for going there, don't you? Well, look about and find one; you, who talk Greek and Latin and have studied the Code, you ought to be able to find one."

Michel shook his head.

"Oh!" said Courtin, "then you have been looking for one?"

"I did not say so," said the young baron, hastily.

"No, but I say so; a man isn't so old at forty that he can't remember what he was at twenty."

Michel was silent and kept his head lowered; the peasant's eye weighed heavily upon him.

"So you couldn't find a way? Well, I've found one for you."

"You!" cried the youth eagerly, looking up. Then, recognizing that he had let his secret thoughts escape him, he added, shrugging his shoulders: "How the devil do you know that I want to go to the castle?"

"Well, the way to do it," said Courtin, seeing that his master made no attempt to deny his wish, "the way is this-

Michel affected indifference, but he was listening with all his ears.

"You say to me, 'Père Courtin, you are mistaken as to your rights; you cannot, either as mayor or the holder of property put the Marquis de Souday's dogs in the pound; you have a right to an indemnity, but this indemnity must be amicably agreed upon.' To which I, Père Courtin, reply: 'If you are concerned in it, Monsieur Michel, I agree; I know your generosity.' On which you say: 'Courtin, you must give me those dogs; the rest is my affair.' And I reply: 'There are the dogs, Monsieur Michel; as for the indemnity, hang it! a gold piece or two will play the game, and I don't want the death of the sinner.' Then, don't you see? you write a bit of a note to the marquis; you have found the dogs, and you send them back by Rousseau or La Belette, for fear he should be anxious. He can't help thanking you and inviting you to call and see him. Perhaps, however, to make quite sure, you had better take the dogs back yourself."

"That will do, Courtin," said the young baron. "Leave the dogs with me; I'll send them to the marquis, not to make him invite me to the castle, for there's not a word of truth in all you have been supposing, but because, between neighbors, it is a courteous thing to do."

"Very good, – so be it; but, all the same, they are two pretty slips, those girls. As for the indemnity-

"Ah, yes," said the young baron, laughing, "that's fair; you want the indemnity for the injury the hounds did you by passing over my land and eating up half the hare which Bertha killed."

And he gave the farmer what he happened to have in his pocket, which was three or four louis. It was lucky for him there was no more, for he was so delighted at finding a way to present himself at the château de Souday that he would willingly have given the farmer ten times that sum if by chance it had been in his purse.

Courtin cast an appreciative eye on the golden louis he had just received under the head of "indemnity," and putting the leash in the hand of the young man he went his way.

But after going a few steps he turned round and came back to his master.

"Don't mix yourself up too much with those people, Monsieur Michel," he said. "You know what I told you just now about those *messieurs* at Torfu and Montaigu; it is all true, and mark my words, in less than fifteen days there'll be a fine row."

This time he departed for good, singing "La Parisienne," for the words and tune of which he had a great predilection.

The young man was left alone with the two dogs.

X. IN WHICH THINGS DO NOT HAPPEN PRECISELY AS BARON MICHEL DREAMED THEY WOULD

Our lover's first idea was to follow Courtin's original advice and send the dogs back to the Marquis de Souday by Rousseau and La Belette, two serving-men belonging partly to the château and partly to the farm, who owed the nicknames by which Courtin has presented them to the reader, one to the ruddy color of his hair, the other to the resemblance of his face to that of a weasel whose obesity La Fontaine has celebrated in one of his prettiest fables.

But after due reflection the young man feared that the Marquis de Souday might content himself with sending a simple letter of thanks and no invitation. If, unfortunately, the marquis should act thus, the occasion was lost; he would have to wait for another; and one so excellent as this could not be expected to happen every day. If, on the contrary, he took the dogs back himself he must infallibly be received; a neighbor would never be allowed to bring back valuable strayed dogs in person, over a distance of ten or a dozen miles, without being invited in to rest, and possibly, if it was late, to pass the night at the castle.

Michel pulled out his watch; it was a little after six. We think we mentioned that Madame la Baronne Michel had preserved, or rather had taken a habit of dining at four o'clock. In her father's house Madame la baronne had dined at mid-day. The young baron had therefore ample time to go to the castle.

But it was a great resolution to take; and decision of character was not, as we have already informed the reader, the predominating feature in Monsieur Michel's character. He lost a quarter of an hour in hesitation. Fortunately, in these May days the sun did not set till eight o'clock. Besides, he could properly present himself as late as nine.

But then-perhaps the young ladies after a hunting-day would go to bed early? It was not, of course, the marquis whom the baron wanted to see. He wouldn't have gone a mile for that purpose; whereas to see Mary he felt he could march a hundred. So at last he decided to start at once.

Only, and this was indeed a hindrance, he suddenly perceived that he had no hat. To get it he must return to the château, at the risk of encountering his mother and all her cross-questioning, – whose dogs were those? where was he going? etc.

But did he really want a hat? The hat, that is, the lack of it, would be set down to neighborly eagerness; or else the wind had taken it; or else a branch had knocked it down a ravine, and he could not follow it on account of the dogs. At any rate, it was worse to encounter his mother than to go without his hat; accordingly he started, hatless, leading the dogs in the leash.

He had hardly made a dozen steps before he discovered that it would not take him the seventy-five minutes he had calculated to get to Souday. No sooner were the hounds aware of the direction in which their new leader was taking them than it was all he could do to hold them back. They smelt their kennel, and dragged at the leash with all their might; if harnessed to a light carriage they would have made the distance in half an hour. The young man, forced to keep up with them at a trot, would certainly do it in three-quarters.

After twenty minutes of this lively gait Michel reached the forest of Machecoul, intending to make a short cut through it. It was necessary to mount a rather steep slope before entering the wood, and when he reached the top he halted to get his breath. Not so with the dogs, who got their breath while running and wanted to keep on their way. The baron opposed this desire by planting himself firmly on his feet and leaning back while they dragged him forward. Two equal forces neutralize each other, – that is one of the first principles of mechanics. The young baron was the stronger, therefore he neutralized the force of the two dogs.

This done, and quiet resulting, he took out his handkerchief to mop his forehead. While he did so, enjoying the cool freshness of the breeze as it breathed on his face from the invisible lips of evening, he fancied he heard a cry wafted upon that breeze. The dogs heard it too, and they answered it with that long, mournful cry of a lost animal. Then they began to pull at their chain with fresh energy.

The baron was now rested and his forehead was mopped; he was therefore quite as ready as Galon-d'Or and Allégro to continue the way; instead of leaning back he leaned forward, and his little jog-trot was resumed.

He had scarcely gone a few hundred steps before the same cry, or rather call, was repeated, but very much nearer and therefore more distinct than the first. The dogs answered by a long howl and a more determined drag on their collars. The young man now felt certain that the cry proceeded from some one in search of the dogs, and he bawled to them (*hauler*). We beg pardon of our readers for using so unacademic a word, but it is the one our peasants use to represent the peculiar shout of a huntsman calling in his dogs. It has the advantage of being expressive; and besides (for a last and better reason), I know no other.

About six hundred paces farther on the same cry was repeated for the third time by the seeking man and the missing hounds. This time Galon-d'Or and Allégro tore along with such vigor that their conductor was almost carried off his feet, and was forced to make his jog-trot a quick trot and his quick trot a gallop.

He had scarcely kept along at that pace for three minutes before a man appeared among the trees, jumped the ditch beside the road, and barred the baron's way. The man was Jean Oullier.

"Ah, ha!" he cried; "so it's you, my pretty man, who not only turn my dogs off the trail of the wolf I am hunting to that of a hare you're after, but actually couple them, and lead 'em in a leash!"

"Monsieur," said the young man, all out of breath, "if I have coupled them and led them it is to have the honor of returning them to Monsieur le Marquis de Souday myself."

"Ho! yes, that's a likely story, – with no hat on your head! You needn't trouble yourself any further, my good sir. Now you've met me I'll take them back myself."

So saying, and before Monsieur Michel had time to oppose or even guess his intention, Jean Oullier wrenched the chain from his hand and threw it on the necks of the hounds, very much as we throw a bridle on the neck of a horse. Finding themselves at liberty the dogs darted at full speed in the direction of the castle, followed by Jean Oullier, whose pace was equal to theirs as he cracked his whip and shouted: -

"Kennel! kennel, scamps!"

The whole scene was so rapid that dogs and man were nearly out of sight before the young baron recovered himself. He stopped short helplessly in the roadway, and must have been there ten minutes, gazing, with his mouth open, in the direction Jean Oullier and the dogs had taken, when the soft and caressing voice of a young girl said close beside him: -

"Gracious goodness! Monsieur le baron, what are you doing here at this hour, bareheaded?"

What he was doing, the young man would have been rather puzzled to say; in point of fact he was following his hopes, which had flown away in the direction of the castle, whither he dared not follow them. He turned round to see who spoke to him, and recognized his foster- sister, the daughter of the farmer Tinguy.

"Oh, it is you, Rosine, is it?" he said; "what are you doing here yourself?"

"Monsieur le baron," said the girl, in a tearful voice, "I have just come from the château de la Logerie, where Madame la baronne treated me very unkindly."

"Why so, Rosine? You know my mother loves you and takes care of you."

"Yes, as a general thing; but not to-day."

"Why not to-day?"

"She has just had me turned out of the house."

"Why didn't you ask for me?"

"I did ask for you, Monsieur le baron, but they said you were not at home."

"I was at home; I have only just come out, my dear; for fast as you may have come, I'll answer for it I came faster!"

"Maybe; it is likely enough, Monsieur le baron; for when Madame was so cruel to me I thought I would come and ask the wolves to help me, but couldn't decide at once to do so."

"What help can the *wolves* give you?"

Michel forced himself to utter the word.

"The help I wanted Madame la baronne to give me, for my poor father who is very ill."

"What is the matter with him?"

"A fever he caught in the marshes."

"A fever?" repeated Michel; "is it a malignant fever, – intermittent or typhoid?"

"I don't know, Monsieur le baron."

"What does the doctor say?"

"Oh, goodness! the doctor lives at Palluau; he won't trouble himself to come here under five francs, and we are not rich enough to pay five francs for a doctor's visit."

"And didn't my mother give you any money?"

"Why, I told you she wouldn't even see me! 'A fever!' she said; 'and Rosine dares to come to the château when her father has a fever? Send her away.'"

"Oh, impossible!"

"I heard her, Monsieur le baron, she spoke so loud; besides, the proof is that they turned me out of the house."

"Wait, wait!" cried the young man eagerly, "I'll give you the money." He felt in his pockets. Then he remembered that he had given Courtin all he had with him. "Confound it! I haven't a penny on me," he said. "Come back with me to the château, Rosine, and I'll give you all you want."

"No, no!" said the young girl; "I wouldn't go back for all the gold in the world! No, my resolution is taken: I shall go to the wolves; they are charitable; they won't turn away a poor girl who wants help for a dying father."

"But-but," said the young man, hesitating, "I am told they are not rich."

"Who are not rich?"

"The Demoiselles de Souday."

"Oh! it isn't money people ask of them, – it isn't alms they give; it is something better than that, and God knows it."

"What is it, then?"

"They go themselves when people are sick; and if they can't cure them, they comfort them in dying, and mourn with those who are left."

"Yes," said the young man, "that may be for ordinary illness, but when it is a dangerous fever—"

"They wouldn't mind that, – not they! There's nothing dangerous to kind hearts. I shall go to them, and you'll see they'll come. If you stay here ten minutes more you'll see me coming back with one or other of the sisters, who will help me nurse my father. Good-bye, Monsieur Michel. I never would have thought Madame la baronne could be so cruel! To drive away like a thief the daughter of the woman who nursed you!"

The girl walked on and the young man made no answer; there was nothing he could say. But Rosine had dropped a word which remained in his mind: "If you stay here ten minutes you will see me coming back with one or other of the sisters." He resolved to stay. The opportunity he had lost in one direction came back to him from another. Oh! if only Mary should be the one to come out with Rosine!

But how could he suppose that a young girl of eighteen, the daughter of the Marquis de Souday, would leave her home at eight o'clock at night and go five miles to nurse a poor peasant ill of a

dangerous fever? It was not only improbable, but it was actually impossible. Rosine must have made the sisters better than they were, just as others made them worse.

Besides, was it believable that his mother, noted for her piety and claiming all the virtues, could have acted in this affair just the reverse of two young girls of whom so much evil was said in the neighborhood? But if things should happen as Rosine said, wouldn't that prove that these young girls had souls after God's own heart? Of course, however, it was quite certain that neither of them would come.

The young man was repeating this for the tenth time in as many minutes when he saw, at the angle of the road round which Rosine had disappeared, the shadows of two women. In spite of the coming darkness he saw that one was Rosine; but as for the person with her, it was impossible to recognize her identity, for she was wrapped in a large mantle.

Baron Michel was so perplexed in mind, and his heart above all was so agitated, that his legs failed him, and he stood stock-still till the girls came up to him.

"Well, Monsieur le baron," said Rosine, with much pride, "what did I tell you?"

"What did you tell him?" said the girl in the mantle.

Michel sighed. By the firm and decided tone of voice he knew she was Bertha.

"I told him that I shouldn't be turned away from your house as I was from the château de la Logerie," answered Rosine.

"But," said Michel, "perhaps you have not told Mademoiselle de Souday what is the matter with your father."

"From the symptoms," said Bertha, "I suppose it is typhoid fever. That is why we have not a minute to lose; it is an illness that requires to be taken in time. Are you coming with us, Monsieur Michel?"

"But, mademoiselle," said the young man, "typhoid fever is contagious."

"Some say it is, and others say it is not," replied Bertha, carelessly.

"But," insisted Michel, "it is deadly."

"Yes, in many cases; though it is often cured."

The young man went close up to Bertha.

"Are you really going to expose yourself to such a danger?" he said.

"Of course I am."

"For an unknown man, a stranger to you?"

"Those who are strangers to us," said Bertha, with infinite gentleness, "are fathers, brothers, husbands, to other human beings. There is no such thing as a stranger in this world, Monsieur Michel; even to you this man may be something."

"He was the husband of my nurse," stammered Michel.

"There! you see," said Bertha, "you can't regard him as a stranger."

"I did offer to go back to the château with Rosine and give her the money to get a doctor."

"And she refused, preferring to come to us? Thank you, Rosine," said Bertha.

The young man was dumfounded. He had heard of charity, but he had never seen it; and here it was embodied in the form of Bertha. He followed the young girls thoughtfully, with his head down.

"If you are coming with us, Monsieur Michel," said Bertha, "be so kind as to carry this little box, which contains the medicines."

"No," said Rosine, "Monsieur le baron can't come with us, for he knows what a dread madame has of contagious diseases."

"You are mistaken, Rosine," said the young man; "I am going with you."

And he took the box from Bertha's hands. An hour later they all three reached the cottage of the sick man.

XI. THE FOSTER-FATHER

The cottage stood, not in the village but on the outskirts of it, a gunshot distant or thereabouts. It was close to a little wood, into which the back-door opened.

The goodman Tinguy—that was the term usually applied to Rosine's father—was a Chouan of the old type. While still a lad, he fought through the first war in La Vendée under Jolly, Couëtu, Charette, La Rochejaquelein, and others. He was afterwards married and had two children. The eldest, a boy, had been drafted, and was now in the army; the youngest was Rosine.

At the birth of each child the mother, like other poor peasant-women, had taken a nursling. The foster-brother of the boy was the last scion of a noble family of Maine, Henri de Bonneville, who will presently appear in this history. The foster-brother of Rosine was, as we have already said, Michel de la Logerie, one of the chief actors in our drama.

Henri de Bonneville was two years older than Michel; the two boys had often played together on the threshold of the door that Michel was about to cross, following Bertha and Rosine. Later on they met in Paris; and Madame de la Logerie had encouraged the intimacy of her son with a young man of large fortune and high rank in the Western provinces.

These foster-children had greatly eased the circumstances of the Tinguy family; but the Vendéan peasant is so constituted that he never admits that he is comfortably off. Tinguy was now making himself out poor at the expense of his life. Ill as he was, nothing would have induced him to send to Palluau for a doctor, whose visit would have cost him five francs. Besides, no peasant, and the Vendéan peasant least of all, believes in a doctor or in medicine. This was why Rosine, when they wanted help, applied first at the château de la Logerie, as foster-sister of the young baron, and then, being driven thence, to the Demoiselles de Souday.

At the noise the young people made on entering the sick man rose on his elbow, with difficulty, but immediately fell back on the bed with a piteous moan. A candle was burning, which lighted the bed only; the rest of the room was in darkness. The light showed, on a species of cot or pallet, a man over fifty years of age, struggling in the grasp of the demon of fever. He was pale to lividness; his eyes were glassy and sunken, and from time to time his body shook from head to foot, as if it had come in contact with a galvanic battery.

Michel shuddered at the sight. He understood at once why his mother, fearing contagion, and knowing that Rosine must come from that bedside impregnated with the miasmas of the disease, which were floating almost visibly in the circle of light around that dying bed, was unwilling to let Rosine enter the château. He wished for camphor, or chloride of lime, or some disinfectant to isolate the sick man from the well man, but having nothing of the kind he stood as near the door as he could to breathe the fresh air.

As for Bertha, she seemed to pay no attention to all that; she went straight to the patient and took his hand. Michel made a motion as if to stop her, and opened his lips to utter a cry; but he was, in a measure, petrified by the boldness of her charity, and he kept his place silently, in admiring terror.

Bertha questioned the sick man. He replied that in the morning, when he rose he had felt so weary that his legs gave way under him when he attempted to walk. This was a warning given by Nature; but the peasantry seldom pay heed to such advice. Instead of getting back into bed and sending for a doctor, Tinguy dressed himself, went down into the cellar for a pot of cider, and cut himself a slice of bread, — to "strengthen him up," as he said. His pot of cider tasted good, but he could not eat the bread. Then he went to his work in the fields.

As he went along, he had terrible pains in his head and a bleeding at the nose; his weariness was excessive, and he was forced to sit down once or twice. When he came to a brook he drank of it; but this did not slake his thirst, which was so great that he even drank the water out of a puddle.

When at last he reached his field he had not the strength to put a spade into the furrow he had begun the night before, and he stood for some moments leaning on his tool. Then his head turned, and he lay down, or rather fell down on the ground in a state of utter prostration.

There he remained till seven in the evening, and might have stayed all night if a peasant from the little town of Légé had not happened to come along. Seeing a man lying in the field, he called to him. Tinguy did not answer, but he made a movement. The peasant went nearer and recognized him. With great difficulty he got the sick man home; Tinguy was so feeble that it took him over an hour to go half a mile.

Rosine was watching for him anxiously. When she saw him she was frightened, and wished to go to Palluau and fetch the doctor; but her father positively forbade it, and went to bed, declaring it would be nothing and the next day he should be well. But as his thirst, instead of lessening, continued to increase, he told Rosine to put a pitcher of water by his bedside for the night. He spent the night thus, devoured by thirst, and drinking incessantly without allaying the fever that burned within him. The next morning he tried to rise; but he no sooner sat up in bed than his head, in which he complained of violent shooting pains, became dizzy, and he was seized with a violent pain in the right side.

Rosine insisted on going for M. Roger (that was the name of the doctor at Palluau); but again her father forbade her. The girl then stayed quietly by his bed, ready to obey his wishes and serve his needs. His greatest need was for drink; every ten minutes he asked for water.

Matters went on thus till four in the afternoon. Then the sick man shook his head and said, "I see I have got a bad fever; you must go and get me some help from the good ladies at the castle." We know the results of Rosine's expedition.

After feeling the sick man's pulse and listening to this account of his illness, given with great difficulty, Bertha, who counted above a hundred pulsations, was sure that Tinguy was in a dangerous state. What the exact nature of the fever was she was too ignorant of the science of medicine to decide. But as the sick man was constantly crying for "Drink! drink!" she cut a lemon in slices, boiled it in a potful of water, sweetened it slightly, and let the sick man drink it in place of pure water.

It is to be remarked that when she wanted to sweeten the infusion Rosine told her there was no sugar in the house; sugar, to a Vendéan peasant, is the supreme of luxury. Fortunately, the provident Bertha had put a few lumps into the little box which contained her medicines. She cast her eyes about her in search of the box, and saw it under the arm of the young man, who was still standing near the door.

She made him a sign to come to her; but before he could obey she made him another sign to stay where he was. Then she went up to him herself, laying a finger on her lips, and said in a low voice, so that the patient might not hear her: -

"The man's condition is very serious. I dare not take much upon myself. It is absolutely necessary to have a doctor, and even so, I fear it will be too late. Will you go to Palluau, dear Monsieur Michel, and fetch Doctor Roger? Meantime I will give Tinguy something to quiet him."

"But you-you?" said the young baron, anxiously.

"I shall stay here; you will find me when you get back. I have some important things to say to the patient."

"Important things?" said Michel, astonished.

"Yes."

"But-" insisted the young man.

"I assure you," interrupted the young girl, "that every minute's delay is of consequence. Taken in time these fevers are often fatal; neglected, as this has been, there is little hope. Go at once, - at once, and bring back the doctor."

"But," persisted the young man, "suppose the fever is contagious?"

"What then?"

"Won't you run great risk of taking it?"

"My dear monsieur," said Bertha, "if we stopped to think about such things half the sick peasants would die. Come, go; and trust to God to take care of me."

She held out her hand to him; the young man took it. Carried away by the admiration he felt at seeing in a woman a grand and simple courage of which he, a man, was incapable, he pressed his lips with a sort of passion upon it.

The movement was so rapid and unexpected that Bertha quivered, turned very pale, and sighed as she said: -

"Go, friend; go!"

She did not need, this time, to reiterate her order. Michel sprang from the cottage. A mysterious fire seemed to run through his veins and doubled his vital power; he felt a strange, new force within him. He fancied he was capable of accomplishing miracles; it seemed to him that like the antique Mercury, wings had grown upon his head and heels. If a wall had barred the way he would have scaled it; if a river were flowing across his path, without bridge or ford, he would have swum it, not stopping to fling off his clothes. He only regretted that Bertha had asked him to do so easy a thing; he would fain have had obstacles, some difficult-nay, impossible-quest! How could Bertha be grateful to him for only going a few miles to fetch a doctor? A few miles! when he longed to go to the end of the world for her! Why couldn't he give some proof of heroism which might match his courage with Bertha's own?

Of course, in such a state of exaltation the young baron never dreamed of fatigue. The three and a half miles to Palluau were done in less than half an hour. Doctor Roger was a familiar visitor at the château of La Logerie, which is hardly an hour's distance from Palluau. Michel had only to send up his name before the doctor, who had gone to bed called out that he would be ready in five minutes.

At the end of that time he appeared in the salon, and asked the young man what could possibly bring him there at that unusual time of night. In two words Michel told the doctor the state of the case; and as M. Roger seemed a good deal surprised at his taking so lively an interest in a peasant as to come on foot, at night, with an agitated manner and bathed in perspiration, the young baron hastened to explain his interest by the ties of affection which naturally bound him to his foster-father.

Questioned by the doctor as to the symptoms of the illness, Michel repeated faithfully all he had heard, and begged M. Roger to take with him the necessary remedies, – the village of Légé not yet having attained to the civilization of possessing an apothecary. Noticing that the young baron was reeking with perspiration, and finding that he had come on foot, the doctor, who had already ordered his horse to be saddled, changed the order and had him harnessed to his carriage.

Michel was most anxious to prevent this arrangement; he declared that he could go on foot much faster than the doctor could go on horseback. He was, in fact, so powerful, with that valiant vigor of youth and heart, that he probably could have done so as fast, or even faster, than the doctor on his horse. The doctor insisted, Michel refused; and the discussion ended by his darting out of the house and calling back to Monsieur Roger: -

"Come as fast as you can. I'll announce your coming!"

The doctor began to think that Madame de la Logerie's son was mad. He said to himself that he should soon overtake him, and did not change the order for the carriage.

It was the thought of appearing before the eyes of the young girl in a carriage which so exasperated the lover. He fancied Bertha would feel more grateful to him if she saw him arrive all out of breath and open the cottage door, crying out, "Here I am! the doctor is following me!" than if she saw him driving up in a carriage, accompanying the doctor. On horseback, on a fine courser, mane and tail flying in the wind, his arrival announced by snorts and neighs, it would have been another thing; but in a carriage! – ten thousand times better go on foot! A first love teems with poesy, and it feels a bitter hatred to the prosaic. What would Mary think when her sister told her she had sent the young baron to Palluau for Doctor Roger, and that the young baron had returned in the doctor's carriage!

No, no; better a thousand times, as we have said, arrive on foot. The young fellow understood very well that this first appearance on the stage of love with heaving breast and ardent eyes, dust on his clothes, hair streaming in the wind, was good, good, and well done. As for the patient, heavens! he was well-nigh forgotten, we must admit, in the midst of this excitement; at any rate, it was not of him that Michel thought, but of the two sisters. His poor foster-father would not have driven him across the country at the rate of seven miles an hour; it was Bertha, it was Mary. The exciting cause in this grand physiological cataclysm now taking place in our hero had become a mere accessory. Michel, under the name of Hippomenes, struggling for the prize with Atalanta, had no need to drop the golden apples on his way. He laughed to scorn the idea that the doctor and his horse could overtake him; and he felt a sensation of physical delight as the cold night-wind chilled the moisture on his brow. Overtaken by the doctor! Sooner death than that!

It had taken him half an hour to go; it took him twenty-five minutes to return.

As though Bertha had expected or divined this impossible celerity, she had gone to the threshold of the door to await her messenger. She knew that in all probability he could not be back till half an hour later, and yet she went out to listen for him. She thought she heard steps in the far distance. Impossible! it could not be he already; and yet she never doubted that it was he.

In fact, a moment later she saw him looming, appearing, then clearly defined upon the darkness, while at the same time he, with his eyes fixed on the door, all the while doubting them, saw her standing there motionless, her hand on her heart, which, for the first time in her life, was beating violently.

When he reached her the youth, like the Greek of Marathon, was voiceless, breathless, and came near dropping, if not as dead as the Greek, at least in a faint. He had only strength to say: -

"The doctor is following me."

Then, in order not to fall, he leaned with his hand against the wall. If he could have said more he might have cried: -

"You will tell Mademoiselle Mary, won't you? that it was for love of her and of you that I have done seven miles in fifty minutes."

But he could not speak; so that Bertha believed, and had ground for believing, that it was for love of her, and her alone, that the young messenger had performed his feat. She smiled with pleasure. Drawing her handkerchief from her pocket, she said, softly wiping the young man's forehead, and taking great care not to touch his wound: -

"Good heavens! how sorry I am that you took my request to hasten so much to heart! What a state you are in!" Then scolding him like a mother, she added in a tender tone, "What a child you are!"

That word "child" was said in a tone of such indescribable tenderness that it made Michel quiver. He seized Bertha's hand; it was moist and trembling. Just then the sound of wheels was heard on the high-road.

"Ah! here is the doctor," she cried, pushing away the young man's hand.

Michel looked at her in amazement. Why did she push away his hand? He was, of course, unable to give a clear account to himself of what was passing in a girl's mind; but he felt, instinctively, that although she repulsed him it was not from dislike or anger.

Bertha went back into the cottage, no doubt to prepare for the doctor's arrival. Michel stayed at the door to receive him. When he saw him coming along in his wicker vehicle, which shook him grotesquely, the young fellow congratulated himself more than ever for having come on foot. It was true that if Bertha had gone in, as she had just done, when she heard the wheels she would not have seen him in that vulgar trap. But if he had not already returned would she, or would she not, have waited till he came?

Michel told himself that it was more than probable she would have waited, and he felt in his heart, if not the warm satisfactions of love, at any rate the soft ticklings of vanity.

XII. NOBLESSE OBLIGE

When the doctor entered the room Bertha was beside the patient. The first thing that met M. Roger's eyes was her graceful form, like those of the angels in German legends bending forward to receive the souls of the dying. He knew her at once, for he was rarely called to the cottages of the poor that he did not find either her or her sister between death and the dying.

"Oh, doctor," she said, "come quick! poor Tinguy is delirious."

The patient was under much excitement. The doctor went to him.

"Come, friend," said he, "be calm."

"Let me alone! let me alone!" cried Tinguy. "I must get up; they want me at Montaigu."

"No, dear Tinguy," said Bertha, "no; they are not expecting you just yet."

"Yes, mademoiselle; yes, they are! It was for to-night. Who will go from house to house and carry the news if I'm not there?"

"Hush, Tinguy, hush!" said Bertha; "remember you are ill, and Doctor Roger is here."

"Doctor Roger, is one of us, mademoiselle; we can talk before him. He knows they are waiting for me; he knows I must get up at once. I must go to Montaigu."

Doctor Roger and the young girl looked at each other.

"*Massa*," said the doctor.

"*Marseille*," replied Bertha.

And then, with a spontaneous movement, they shook hands.

Bertha returned to the patient.

"Yes," she said, bending to his ear, "you are right. The doctor is one of us; but there is some one else here who is not." She lowered her voice so that only Tinguy could hear. "And that," she added, "is the young Baron Michel."

"Ah, true," said the goodman. "Don't let him hear anything. Courtin is a traitor. But if I don't go to Montaigu, who will?"

"Jean Oullier. Don't worry, Tinguy."

"Oh! if Jean Oullier will go," said the sick man, – "if Jean Oullier will go I need not. His foot's good, and his eye true; he can fire straight, he can!"

And he burst out laughing; but in that laugh he seemed to expend his last vital strength and fell backward on the bed.

The young baron had listened to this dialogue (of which he could only hear portions) without in the least understanding it. All he distinctly made out was, "Courtin is a traitor," and from the direction of the young girl's eye as she spoke with the peasant he was certain that they were talking of him. His heart contracted; they had some secret in which they would not let him share. He went up to Bertha.

"Mademoiselle," he said, "if I am in your way, or if you have no further need of me, say the word and I retire."

He spoke in a tone of so much pain that Bertha was touched.

"No," she said, "stay. We need you still; you must help Rosine to prepare M. Roger's prescriptions while I talk with him about the case." Then to the doctor she said, in a low voice, "Keep them busy, and you can tell me what you know, and I will tell you what I know." Turning again to Michel she added, in her sweetest voice, "I know, my dear friend, that you will be willing to help Rosine."

"As long as you wish, mademoiselle; give your orders and I will obey them," said the young man.

"You see, doctor," said Bertha, smiling, "you have two willing helpers."

The doctor went out to his vehicle and returned with a bottle of Sedlitz water and a package of mustard.

"Here," he said to Michel, giving him the bottle, "uncork that and make him drink half a glassful every ten minutes. And you, Rosine," giving her the mustard, "mix that into a paste with hot water; it is to be put on the soles of your father's feet."

The sick man had dropped back into the state of apathetic indifference which preceded the excitement Bertha had calmed by assuring him that Jean Oullier would take his place. The doctor cast a look at him, and seeing that in his present state of quiescence he could safely be left to the care of the young baron, he went eagerly up to Bertha.

"Mademoiselle de Souday," he said, "since it seems that we hold the same opinions, what news have you?"

"Madame left Massa on the 21st of last April, and she ought to have landed at Marseille on the 29th or 30th. This is now the 6th of May. Madame must have disembarked, and the whole South ought by this time to have risen."

"Is that all you know?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, all," replied Bertha.

"You have not read the evening papers of the 3d?"

"We do not get any papers at the château de Souday," she said.

"Well," said the doctor, "the whole thing failed."

"Is it possible! Failed?"

"Yes, Madame was utterly misled."

"Good God! what are you telling me?"

"The exact truth. Madame, after a prosperous voyage in the 'Carlo Alberto,' landed on the coast at some little distance from Marseille. A guide awaited her and took her to a lonely house in the woods. Madame had only six persons with her--"

"Oh! go on; go on!"

"She sent one of those persons to Marseille to inform the leader of the movement that she had landed and was awaiting the result of the promises which had brought her to France--"

"Well?"

"That evening the messenger came back with a note, congratulating the princess on her safe arrival, and saying that Marseille would rise on the following day--"

"Yes; what then?"

"The next day an attempt was made, but Marseille would not rise at all. The people would take no part in the affair, which failed utterly."

"And Madame?"

"It is not known where she is; but they hope she re-embarked on the 'Carlo Alberto.'"

"Cowards!" muttered Bertha. "I am nothing but a woman; but oh! I swear to God that if Madame comes into La Vendée I will set an example to some men. Good-bye, doctor, and thank you."

"Must you go?"

"Yes; it is important that my father should know this news. He is at a meeting to-night at the château de Montaigu. I must get back to Souday. I commit my poor patient to you. Leave exact directions, and I or my sister, unless something unforeseen prevents, will be here to-morrow and watch at night."

"Will you take my carriage? I can get back on foot, and you can return it by Jean Oullier, or any one, to-morrow."

"Thank you, no; I don't know where Jean Oullier may be to-morrow. Besides, I prefer walking; the air will do me good."

Bertha held out her hand to the doctor, pressed his with almost masculine strength, threw her mantle over her shoulders, and left the cottage. At the door she found Michel, who, although he could not hear the conversation, had kept his eye on the young girl, and, seeing that she was about to depart, got to the door before her.

"Ah! mademoiselle," he exclaimed, "what has happened? What have you just heard?"

"Nothing," said Bertha.

"Nothing! If you had heard nothing you would not be starting off in such a hurry, without a word to me, – without so much as signing to me, or saying good-bye."

"Why should I say good-bye, inasmuch as you are going with me? When we reach the gate of Souday will be time enough to bid you good-bye."

"What! will you allow me?"

"To accompany me? Certainly. After all you have done for me this evening, it is your right, my dear Monsieur Michel, – that is, unless you are too fatigued."

"I, mademoiselle, too fatigued, when it is a matter of accompanying you! With you, or with Mademoiselle Mary, I would go to the end of the world. Fatigued? Heavens, no!"

Bertha smiled, murmuring to herself, "What a pity he is not one of us!" Then she added under her breath, "One could do as one pleased with a nature like his."

"Are you speaking?" said Michel. "I did not quite catch what you say."

"I spoke very low."

"Why do you speak low?"

"Because what I was saying cannot be said out loud, – not yet, at least."

"But later?"

"Ah! later, perhaps-"

The young man in turn moved his lips, and made no sound.

"What does that pantomime mean?" asked Bertha.

"It means that I can speak below my breath as you do, with this difference, that what I say low I am ready to say out loud and instantly, – at this very moment if I dared-"

"I am not a woman like other women," said Bertha, with an almost disdainful smile; "and what is said to me in a low voice may equally well be said aloud."

"Well then, what I was saying below my breath was this; I grieve to see you flinging yourself into danger, – danger as certain as it is useless."

"What danger are you talking about, my dear neighbor?" said the girl, in a slightly mocking tone.

"That about which you were speaking to Doctor Roger just now. An uprising is to take place in La Vendée."

"Really?"

"You will not deny that, I think."

"I? – why should I deny it?"

"Your father and you are taking part in it."

"You forget my sister," said Bertha, laughing.

"No, I forget no one," said Michel, with a sigh.

"Go on."

"Let me tell you-as a tender friend, a devoted friend-that you are wrong."

"And why am I wrong, my tender, my devoted friend," asked Bertha, with the tinge of satire she could never quite eliminate from her nature.

"Because La Vendée is not in 1832 what she was in 1793; or rather, because there is no longer a Vendée."

"So much the worse for La Vendée! But, happily, there is always the Noblesse, – you don't yet know, Monsieur Michel, but your children's children in the sixth generation will know the meaning of the words NOBLESSE OBLIGE."

The young man made a hasty movement.

"Now," said Bertha, "let's talk of something else; for on this topic I will not say another word, inasmuch as you are not-as poor Tinguy says-one of us."

"But," said the young man, hurt by Bertha's tone toward him, "what shall we talk about?"

"Why, anything, – everything. The night is magnificent, talk to me of the night; the moon is brilliant, talk of the moon; the stars are dazzling, tell me about the stars; the heavens are pure, let us talk of the heavens."

She raised her head and let her eyes rest on the clear and starry firmament. Michel sighed; he said nothing, and walked on beside her. What could he say—that man of books and city walls—about the nature that seemed her fitting kingdom? Had he, like Bertha, been in contact from his infancy with the wonders of creation? Had he watched, like her, the gradations through which the dawn ascends and the sun sinks down? Did his ear know, like hers, the mysterious sounds of night? When the lark rang out its reveille did he know what the lark was saying? When the gurgle of the nightingale filled the darkness with harmony could he tell what that throat was uttering? No, no. He knew the things of science, which Bertha did not know; but Bertha knew the things of nature, and of all such things he was ignorant. Oh! if the young girl had only spoken then, how religiously his heart would have listened to her.

But, unfortunately, she was silent. Her heart was full of thoughts which escaped in looks and sighs, and not in sounds and words.

He, too, was dreaming. He walked beside the gentle Mary, not the harsh, firm Bertha; instead of the self-reliant Bertha, he felt the weaker Mary leaning on his arm. Ah! if she were only there words would come; all the thousand things of the night—the moon, the stars, the sky—would have rushed to his lips. With Mary he would have been the teacher and the master; with Bertha he was the scholar and the slave.

The two young people walked silently side by side for more than a quarter of an hour, when suddenly Bertha stopped and made a sign to Michel to stop also. The young man obeyed; with Bertha his place was to obey.

"Do you hear?" said Bertha.

"No," said Michel, shaking his head.

"Well, I hear," she said, her eyes gleaming and her ears alert, as she strained them eagerly.

"What do you hear?"

"My horse's step and that of my sister Mary's horse. They are coming for me. Something must have happened." She listened again. "Mary has come herself."

"How can you tell that?" asked the young man.

"By the way the horses gallop. Let us walk faster, please."

The sounds came nearer, and in less than five minutes a dark group showed in the distance. Soon it was seen to be two horses, – a woman riding one and leading the other.

"I told you it was my sister," said Bertha.

The young man had already recognized her, less by her person, scarcely distinguishable in the darkness, than by the beating of his heart.

Mary, too, had recognized him, and this was plain from the gesture of amazement which escaped her. It was evident that she expected to find her sister alone or with Rosine, – certainly not with the young baron. Michel saw the impression his presence had produced, and he advanced.

"Mademoiselle," he said to Mary, "I met your sister on her way to carry assistance to poor Tinguy, and in order that she might not be alone I have accompanied her."

"You did perfectly right, monsieur," replied Mary.

"You don't understand," said Bertha, laughing. "He thinks he must excuse me or excuse himself. Do forgive him for something; his mamma is going to scold him." Then leaning on Mary's saddle, and speaking close to her ear, "What is it, darling?" she asked.

"The attempt at Marseille has failed."

"I know that; and Madame has re-embarked."

"That's a mistake."

"A mistake?"

"Yes. Madame declares that as she is in France she will stay."

"Can it be true?"

"Yes; and she is now on her way to La Vendée, – in fact, she may actually be here now."

"How did you hear all this?"

"Through a message received from her to-night at the château de Montaigu, just as the meeting was about to break up disheartened."

"Gallant soul!" cried Bertha, enthusiastically.

"Papa returned home at full gallop, and finding where you were, he told me to take the horses and fetch you."

"Well, here I am!" said Bertha, putting her foot into the stirrup.

"Are not you going to bid good-bye to your poor knight?"

"Oh, yes," said Bertha, holding out her hand to the young man, who advanced to take it slowly and sadly.

"Ah! Mademoiselle Bertha," he murmured, taking her hand, "I am very unhappy."

"Why?" she asked.

"Not to be, as you said just now, one of you."

"What prevents it?" said Mary, holding out her hand to him.

The young man darted on that hand and kissed it in a passion of love and gratitude.

"Oh! yes, yes, yes," he murmured, so low that Mary alone could hear him; "for you, mademoiselle, and with you."

Mary's hand was roughly torn from his grasp by a sudden movement of her horse. Bertha, in touching hers, had struck that of her sister on the flank. Horses and riders, starting at a gallop, were soon lost like shadows in the darkness.

The young man stood motionless in the roadway.

"Adieu!" cried Bertha.

"Au revoir!" cried Mary.

"Yes, yes, yes," he said, stretching his arms toward their vanishing figures; "yes, au revoir! au revoir!"

The two girls continued their way without uttering a word, until they reached the castle gate, and there Bertha said, abruptly: -

"Mary, I know you will laugh at me!"

"Why?" asked Mary, trembling.

"I love him!" replied Bertha.

A cry of pain had almost escaped from Mary's lips, but she smothered it.

"And I called to him 'au revoir!'" she whispered to herself. "God grant I may never, never see him again."

XIII.

A DISTANT COUSIN

The day after the events we have just related, – that is to say, on the 7th of May, 1832, – a great dinner-party was given at the château de Vouillé, to celebrate the birthday of Madame la Comtesse de Vouillé, who had on that day completed her twenty-fourth year.

The company had just sat down to table, and at this table, among twenty-five other guests, was the prefect of Vienne and the mayor of Châtellerault, relations more or less distant of Madame de Vouillé.

The soup was just removed when a servant entered the dining-room, and said a few words in Monsieur de Vouillé's ear. Monsieur de Vouillé made the man repeat them twice. Then addressing his guests, he said: –

"I beg you to excuse me for a few moments. A lady has arrived at the gate in a post-chaise, and she insists on speaking to me personally. Will you allow me to see what this lady wants?"

Permission was, of course, unanimously granted, though Madame de Vouillé's eyes followed her husband to the door with some uneasiness.

Monsieur de Vouillé hastened to the gate. There, sure enough, was a post-chaise, containing two persons, a man and a woman. A servant in sky-blue livery with silver lace, was on the box. When he saw Monsieur de Vouillé, whom he seemed to be expecting impatiently, he jumped lightly down.

"Come, come, slow coach!" he said, as soon as the count was near enough to hear him.

Monsieur de Vouillé stopped short, amazed, – more than amazed, stupefied. What manner of servant was this, who dared to apostrophize him in that style? He went nearer to let the fellow know his mind. Then he stopped, and burst out laughing.

"What! is it you, de Lussac?" he said.

"Yes; undoubtedly, it is I."

"What is all this masquerading about?"

The counterfeit servant opened the carriage door and offered his arm to enable the lady to get out of the chaise. Then he said: –

"My dear count, I have the honor to present you to Madame la Duchesse de Berry." Bowing to the duchess, he continued, "Madame la duchesse, Monsieur le Comte de Vouillé is one of my best friends and one of your most devoted servants."

The count retreated a few steps.

"Madame la Duchesse de Berry!" he exclaimed, stupefied.

"In person, monsieur," said the duchess.

"Are you not proud and happy to receive her Royal Highness?" said de Lussac.

"As proud and happy as an ardent royalist can be; but –"

"What! is there a but?" asked the duchess.

"This is my wife's birthday, and we have twenty-five guests now dining with us."

"Well, monsieur, there is a French proverb which says, 'Enough for two is enough for three.' I am sure you will extend the maxim to mean 'Enough for twenty-five is enough for twenty-eight;' for I warn you that Monsieur de Lussac, servant as he is, must dine at table, and he is dying of hunger."

"Yes; but don't be uneasy," said the Baron de Lussac. "I'll take off my livery."

Monsieur de Vouillé seized his head with both hands, as if he meant to tear out his hair.

"What shall I do? what can I do?" he cried.

"Come," said the duchess, "let us talk sense."

"Talk sense!" said the count; "how can I? I am half crazy."

"Evidently not with joy," said the duchess.

"No, with terror, madame."

"Oh! you exaggerate the situation."

"But, madame, you are entering the lion's den. I have the prefect of Vienne and the mayor of Châtellerault at my table."

"Very good; then you will present them to me."

"Good God! and under what title?"

"That of a cousin. You surely have some distant cousin, whose name will answer the purpose."

"What an idea, madame!"

"Come, put it to use."

"I certainly have a cousin in Toulouse, – Madame de la Myre."

"The very thing! I am Madame de la Myre."

Then turning round in the carriage she offered her hand to an old man about sixty-five years of age, who seemed waiting till the discussion ended before he showed himself.

"Come, Monsieur de la Myre," said the duchess, "this is a surprise we are giving our cousin, and we arrive just in time to keep his wife's birthday. Come, cousin!"

So saying she jumped lightly out of the carriage and gayly slipped her arm into that of the Comte de Vouillé.

"Yes, come!" said Monsieur de Vouillé, his mind made up to risk the adventure into which the duchess was so joyously rushing. "Come!"

"Wait for me," cried the Baron de Lussac, jumping into the carriage, which he transformed into a dressing-room, and changing his sky-blue livery for a black surtout coat; "don't leave me behind."

"But who the devil are you to be?" asked M. de Vouillé.

"Oh! I'll be the Baron de Lussac, and-if Madame will permit me-the cousin of your cousin."

"Stop! stop! monsieur le baron," said the old gentleman, who had not yet spoken; "it seems to me that you are taking a great liberty."

"Pooh! we are on a campaign," said the duchess; "I permit it."

Monsieur de Vouillé now bravely led the way into the dining-room. The curiosity of the guests and the uneasiness of the mistress of the house were all the more excited by this prolonged absence. So, when the door of the dining-room opened all eyes turned to the new arrivals.

Whatever difficulties there may have been in playing the parts they had thus unexpectedly assumed, none of the actors were at all disconcerted.

"Dear," said the count to his wife, "I have often spoken to you of my cousin in Toulouse-"

"Madame de la Myre?" interrupted the countess, eagerly.

"Yes, – Madame de la Myre. She is on her way to Nantes, and would not pass the château without making your acquaintance. How fortunate that she comes on your birthday! I hope it will bring luck to both."

"Dear cousin!" said the duchess, opening her arms to Madame de Vouillé.

The two women kissed each other. As for the two men M. de Vouillé contented himself with saying aloud, "Monsieur de la Myre," "Monsieur de Lussac."

The company bowed.

"Now," said M. de Vouillé, "we must find seats for these new-comers, who warn me that they are dying of hunger."

Every one moved a little. The table was large, and all the guests had plenty of elbow-room; it was not difficult therefore to place three additional persons.

"Did you not tell me, my dear cousin," said the duchess, "that the prefect of Vienne was dining with you?"

"Yes, madame; and that is he whom you see on the countess's right, with spectacles, a white cravat, and the rosette of an officer of the Legion of honor in his buttonhole."

"Oh! pray present us."

Monsieur de Vouillé boldly carried on the comedy. He felt there was nothing to be done but to play it out. Accordingly, he approached the prefect, who was majestically leaning back in his chair.

"Monsieur le préfet," he said, "this is my cousin, who, with her traditional respect for authority, thinks that a general presentation is not enough, and therefore wishes to be presented to you particularly."

"Generally, particularly, and officially," replied the gallant functionary, "madame is and ever will be welcome."

"I accept the pledge, monsieur," said the duchess.

"Madame is going to Nantes?" asked the prefect, by way of making a remark.

"Yes, monsieur; and thence to Paris, – at least, I hope so."

"It is not, I presume, the first time that Madame visits the capital?"

"No, monsieur; I lived there twelve years."

"And Madame left it-"

"Oh! very unwillingly, I assure you."

"Recently?"

"Two years ago last July."

"I can well understand that having once lived in Paris-"

"I should wish to return there. I am glad you understand that."

"Oh, Paris! Paris!" said the functionary.

"The paradise of the world!" said the duchess.

"Come, take your seats," said Monsieur de Vouillé.

"Oh, my dear cousin," said the duchess, with a glance at the place he intended for her, "leave me beside Monsieur le préfet, I entreat you. He has just expressed himself with so much feeling about the thing I have most at heart that I place him, at once, on my list of friends."

The prefect, delighted with the compliment, drew aside his chair, and Madame was installed in the seat to his left, to the detriment of the person to whom that place of honor had been assigned. The two men accepted without objection the seats given to them, and were soon busy-M. de Lussac especially-in doing justice to the repast. The other guests followed their example, and for a time nothing broke the solemn silence which attends the beginning of a long-delayed and impatiently awaited dinner.

Madame was the first to break that silence. Her adventurous spirit, like the petrel, was more at ease in a gale.

"Well," she remarked, "I think our arrival must have interrupted the conversation. Nothing is so depressing as a silent dinner. I detest such dinners, my dear count; they are like those state functions at the Tuileries, where, they tell me, no one was allowed to speak unless the king had spoken. What were you all talking about before we came in?"

"Dear cousin," said M. de Vouillé, "the prefect was kindly giving us the official details of that blundering affair at Marseille."

"Blundering affair?" said the duchess.

"That's what he called it."

"And the words exactly describe the thing," said the functionary. "Can you conceive of an expedition of that character for which the arrangements were so carelessly made that it only required a sub-lieutenant of the 13th regiment to arrest one of the leaders of the outbreak and knock the whole affair in the head at once?"

"But don't you know, Monsieur le préfet," said the duchess, in a melancholy tone, "in all great events there is a moment, a supreme moment, when the destinies of princes and empires are shaken like leaves in the wind? For example, when Napoleon at La Mure advanced to meet the soldiers who were sent against him, if a sub-lieutenant of any kind had taken him by the collar the return from Elba would have been nothing more than a *blundering affair*."

There was silence after that, Madame having said the words in a grieved tone. She herself reopened the matter.

"And the Duchesse de Berry?" she said; "is it known what became of her?"

"She returned on board of the 'Carlo Alberto.'"

"Ah!"

"It was the only sensible thing she could do, it seems to me," said the prefect.

"You are quite right, monsieur," said the old gentleman, who had accompanied Madame, and who had not before spoken; "and if I had had the honor to be near her Highness and she had granted me some authority, I should have given her that advice."

"No one was addressing you, my good husband," said the duchess. "I am speaking to the prefect, and I want to know if he is quite sure her Royal Highness has re-embarked?"

"Madame," said the prefect, with one of those administrative gestures which admit of no contradiction, "the government is officially informed of it."

"Ah!" exclaimed the duchess, "if the government is officially informed of it, of course there is nothing to be said; but," she added, venturing on still more slippery ground, "I did hear differently."

"Madame!" said the old gentleman, in a tone of slight reproach.

"What did you hear, cousin?" asked M. de Vouillé, who was beginning to take the interest of a gambler in the game that was being played before him.

"Yes, what have you heard, madame?" said the prefect.

"Oh, you understand, Monsieur le préfet, that it is not for me to give you official news," said the duchess. "I am only telling you of rumors, which may be mere nonsense."

"Madame de la Myre!" said the old man.

"Well, Monsieur de la Myre?" said the duchess.

"Do you know, madame," said the prefect, "that I think your husband is very interfering. I will wager it is he who does not want you to go to Paris?"

"That is precisely true. But I hope to go there in spite of him. 'What woman wills, God wills.'"

"Oh, women! women!" cried the public functionary.

"What now?" asked the duchess.

"Nothing," said the prefect. "I am waiting, Madame, to hear the rumors you mentioned just now about the Duchesse de Berry."

"Oh! they are simple enough. I heard, – but pray remember I give them on no authority but common report, – I have heard that the Duchesse de Berry rejected the advice of all her friends, and obstinately refused to re-embark on the 'Carlo Alberto.'"

"Then where is she now?" asked the prefect.

"In France."

"In France! What can she do in France?"

"Why, you know very well, Monsieur le préfet," said the duchess, "that her Royal Highness's chief object is La Vendée."

"No doubt; but having failed so signally at the South-"

"All the more reason why she should try for success at the West."

The prefect smiled disdainfully.

"Then you really think she has re-embarked?" asked the duchess.

"I can positively assure you," said the prefect, "that she is at this moment in the dominions of the king of Sardinia, from whom France is about to ask an explanation."

"Poor king of Sardinia! He will give a very simple one."

"What?"

"He will say, 'I always knew Madame was a crazy creature; but I never thought her craziness would lead her quite as far as this-'"

"Madame! madame!" said the old man.

"Ah, *ça!* Monsieur de la Myre," said the duchess, "I do hope that although you interfere with my wishes, you will have the grace to respect my opinions, – all the more because I am sure they are those of Monsieur le préfet. Are they not, monsieur?"

"The truth is," said that functionary, laughing, "that her Royal Highness has behaved in this whole affair with the utmost folly."

"There! you see," said the duchess. "What would happen, Monsieur le préfet, if these rumors were true and Madame should really come to La Vendée?"

"How can she get here?" asked the prefect.

"Why, through the neighboring departments, or through yours. They tell me she was seen at Toulouse in an open carriage while changing horses."

"Good heavens!" cried the prefect; "that would be a little too bold."

"So bold that Monsieur le préfet doesn't believe it?"

"Not one word of it," said the official emphasizing each monosyllable as he uttered it.

At that moment the door opened, and one of the count's footmen announced that a clerk from the prefecture asked permission to deliver a telegraphic despatch just received from Paris for the prefect.

"Will you permit him to enter?" said the prefect to the count.

"Why, of course," said the latter.

The clerk entered and gave a sealed package to the prefect, who bowed his excuses to the company for opening it.

Absolute silence reigned. All eyes were fixed on the despatch. Madame exchanged signs with M. de Vouillé, who laughed under his breath, with M. de Lussac, who laughed aloud, and with her so-called husband who maintained his imperturbably grave manner.

"Whew!" cried the public functionary suddenly, while his features were indiscreet enough to betray the utmost surprise.

"What is the news?" asked M. de Vouillé.

"The news is," exclaimed the prefect, "that Madame de la Myre was right in what she said about her Royal Highness. Her Royal Highness has not left France; her Royal Highness is on her way to La Vendée, through Toulouse, Libourne, and Poitiers."

So saying, the prefect rose.

"Where are you going, Monsieur le préfet?" asked the duchess.

"To do my duty, madame, painful as it is, and give orders that her Royal Highness be arrested if, as this despatch warns me, she is imprudent enough to pass through my department."

"Do so, Monsieur le préfet; do so," said the duchess. "I can only applaud your zeal and assure you that I shall remember it when occasion offers."

She held out her hand to the prefect, who kissed it gallantly, after having, with a look, asked Monsieur de la Myre's permission to do so.

XIV. PETIT-PIERRE

Let us now return to the cottage of the goodman Tinguay, which we left for a time to make that excursion to the château de Vouillé.

Forty-eight hours have gone by. Bertha and Michel are again at the sick man's bedside. Though the regular visits which Doctor Roger now paid rendered the young girl's presence in that fever-stricken place unnecessary, Bertha, in spite of Mary's remonstrances, persisted in her care of the Vendéan peasant. Nevertheless, it is probable that Christian charity was not the only motive which drew her to his cottage.

However that may be, it is certain that, by natural coincidence, Michel, who had got over his terrors, was already installed in the cottage when Bertha got there. Was it Bertha for whom Michel was looking? We dare not answer. Perhaps he thought that Mary, too, might take her turn in these charitable functions. Perhaps, too, he may have hoped that the fair-haired sister would not lose this occasion of meeting him, after the warmth of their last parting. His heart therefore beat violently when he saw the shadow of a woman's form, which he knew by its elegance could belong only to a Demoiselle de Souday, projecting itself upon the cottage door.

When he recognized Bertha the young man felt a measure of disappointed hope; but as, by virtue of his love, he was full of tenderness for the Marquis de Souday, of sympathy for the crabbed Jean Oullier, and of benevolence for even their dogs, how could he fail to love Mary's sister? The affection shown to one would certainly bring him nearer to the other; besides, what happiness to hear this sister mention the absent sister. Consequently, he was full of attentions and solicitude for Bertha, who accepted all with a satisfaction she took no pains to conceal.

It was difficult, however, to think of other matters than the condition of the sick man, which was hourly growing worse and worse. He had fallen into that state of torpor and insensibility which physicians call coma, and which, in inflammatory diseases, usually characterizes the period preceding death. He no longer noticed what was passing around him, and answered only when distinctly spoken to. The pupils of his eyes, which were frightfully dilated, were fixed and staring. He was almost rigid, though from time to time his hands endeavored to pull the coverlet over his face, or draw to him something that he seemed to see beside his bed.

Bertha, who, in spite of her youth, had more than once been present at such a scene, no longer felt any hope for the poor man's life. She wished to spare Rosine the anguish of witnessing her father's death-struggle, which she knew was beginning, and she told her to go at once and fetch Doctor Roger.

"But I can go, mademoiselle, if you like," said Michel. "I have better legs than Rosine. Besides, it isn't safe for her to go through those roads at night."

"No, Monsieur Michel, there is no danger for Rosine, and I have my own reasons for keeping you here. I hope it is not disagreeable to you to remain?"

"Oh, mademoiselle, how can you think it? Only I am so happy in being able to serve you that I try to let no occasion pass."

"Don't be anxious about that," said Bertha, smiling; "perhaps, before long, I shall have more than one occasion to put your devotion to the proof."

Rosine had hardly been gone ten minutes before the sick man seemed suddenly and extraordinarily better. His eyes lost their fixed stare, his breathing became easier, his rigid fingers relaxed, and he passed them over his forehead to wipe away the sweat which began to pour from it.

"How do you feel, dear Tinguay?" said the girl.

"Better," he answered, in a feeble voice. "The good God doesn't mean me to desert before the battle," he added, trying to smile.

"Perhaps not; because it is for him you are going to fight."

The peasant shook his head sadly and sighed.

"Monsieur Michel," said Bertha to the young man, drawing him into a corner of the room, so that her voice should not reach the patient, "go and fetch the vicar and rouse the neighbors."

"Isn't he better? He said so just now."

"Child that you are! Did you never see a lamp go out? The last flame is brightest, and so it is with our miserable bodies. Go at once. There will be no death-struggle. The fever has exhausted him; the soul is going without a struggle, shock, or effort."

"And are you to be left alone with him?"

"Go at once, and don't think about me."

Michel went out, and Bertha returned to Tinguy, who held out his hand.

"Thank you, my brave young lady," said the peasant.

"Thank me for what, père Tinguy?"

"For your care, and also for thinking of sending for the vicar."

"You heard me?"

This time Tinguy smiled outright.

"Yes," he said, "low as you spoke."

"But you mustn't think that the presence of the priest means that you are going to die, my good Tinguy. Don't be frightened."

"Frightened!" cried the peasant, trying to sit up in his bed. "Frightened! why? I have respected the old and cared for the young; I have suffered without a murmur; I have toiled without complaining, praising God when the hail beat down my wheat and the harvest failed; never have I turned away the beggar whom Sainte-Anne has sent to my fireside; I have kept the commandments of God and of the Church; when the priests said, 'Rise and take your guns,' I fought the enemies of my faith and my king; I have been humble in victory and hopeful in defeat; I was still ready to give my life for the sacred cause, and shall I be frightened now? Oh, no! mademoiselle; this is the day of days to us poor Christians, – the glorious day of death. Ignorant as I am, I know that this day makes us equals with the great and prosperous of the earth. It has come for me; God calls me to him. I am ready; I go before his judgment-seat in full assurance of his mercy."

Tinguy's face was illuminated as he said the words; but this last religious enthusiasm exhausted the poor man's strength. He fell heavily back upon his pillow, muttering a few unintelligible words, among which could be distinguished "blues," "parish," and the names of God and the Virgin.

The vicar entered at this moment. Bertha showed him the sick man, and the priest, understanding what she wanted of him, began at once the prayer for the dying.

Michel begged Bertha to leave the room, and the young girl consenting, they both went out after saying a last prayer at Tinguy's bedside.

One after the other, the neighbors came in; each knelt down and repeated after the priest the litanies of death. Two slender candles of yellow wax, placed on either side of a brass crucifix, lighted the gloomy scene.

Suddenly, at the moment when the priest and the assistants were reciting mentally the "Ave Maria!" an owl's cry, sounding not far distant from the cottage, rose above the dull hum of their mutterings. The peasants trembled.

At the sound the dying man, whose eyes were already glazing and his breath hissing, raised his head.

"I'm here!" he cried; "I'm ready! I am the guide."

Then he tried to imitate the owl's cry in reply to the one he had heard, but he could not. The lingering breath gave a sob, his head fell back, his eyes opened widely. He was dead.

A stranger stood on the threshold of the door. He was a young Breton peasant, wearing a broad-brimmed hat, a red waistcoat and silver buttons, a blue jacket embroidered with red, and high leather

gaiters. He carried in his hand one of those sticks with iron points, which the country people use when they make a journey.

He seemed surprised at the scene before his eyes; but he asked no question of any one. He quietly knelt down and prayed; then he approached the bed, looked earnestly at the pale, discolored face of the poor peasant. Two heavy tears rolled down his cheeks; he wiped them away, and went out as he had come, silently.

The peasants, used to the religious custom which expects all those who pass the house of death to enter and say a prayer for the soul of the dying and a blessing on the body, were not surprised at the presence of a stranger, and paid no heed to his departure. The latter, on leaving the cottage, met another peasant, younger and smaller than himself, who seemed to be his brother; this one was riding a horse saddled and bridled in peasant fashion.

"Well, Rameau-d'or," said the younger, "what is it?"

"This," replied the other: "there is no place for us in that house. A guest is there whose presence fills it."

"Who is he?"

"Death."

"Who is dead?"

"He whose hospitality we came to ask. I would suggest to you to make a shield of his death and stay here; but I heard some one say that Tinguy died of typhoid fever, and though doctors deny the contagion, I cannot consent to expose you to it."

"You are not afraid that you were seen and recognized?"

"No, impossible. There were eight or ten persons, men and women, praying round the bed. I went in and knelt down and prayed with them. That is what all Breton and Vendéan peasants do in such cases."

"Well, what can we do now?" asked the younger of the two.

"I have already told you. We had to decide between the château of my former comrade or the cottage of the poor fellow who was to have been our guide, – between luxury and a princely house with poor security, and a narrow cottage, bad beds, buckwheat bread, and absolute safety. God himself has decided the matter. We have no choice; we must take the insecure comfort."

"But you think the château is not safe?"

"The château belongs to a friend of my childhood, whose father was made a baron by the Restoration. The father is dead, and the widow and son are now living in the château. If the son were alone, I should have no anxiety. He is rather weak, but his heart is sound. It is his mother I fear; she is selfish and ambitious, and I could not trust her."

"Oh, pooh! just for one night! You are not adventurous, Rameau-d'or."

"Yes I am, on my own account; but I am answerable to France, or at any rate, to my party for the life of Ma-"

"For Petit-Pierre. Ah, Rameau-d'or, that is the tenth forfeit you owe me since we started."

"It shall be the last, Ma-Petit-Pierre, I should say. In future I will think of you by no other name, and in no other relation than that of my brother."

"Come, then; let us go to the château. I am so weary that I would ask shelter of an ogress, – if there were any."

"We'll take a crossroad, which will carry us there in ten minutes," said the young man. "Seat yourself more comfortably in the saddle; I will walk before you, and you must follow me; otherwise we might miss the path, which is very faint."

"Wait a moment," said Petit-Pierre, slipping from his horse.

"Where are you going?" asked Rameau-d'or, anxiously.

"You said your prayer beside that poor peasant, and I want to say mine."

"Don't think of it!"

"Yes, yes; he was a brave and honest man," persisted Petit-Pierre. "He would have risked his life for us; I may well offer a little prayer beside his body."

Rameau-d'or raised his hat and stood aside to let his young companion pass.

The lad, like Rameau-d'or, entered the cottage, took a branch of holly, dipped it in holy water, and sprinkled the body with it. Then he knelt down and prayed at the foot of the bed, after which he left the cottage, without exciting more attention than his companion had done.

The elder helped Petit-Pierre to mount, and together, one in the saddle, the other on foot, they took their way silently across the fields and along an almost invisible path which led, as we have said, in a straight line to the château de la Logerie. They had hardly gone a hundred steps into the grounds when Rameau-d'or stopped short and laid his hand on the bridle of the horse.

"What is it now?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"I hear steps," said the young man. "Draw in behind those bushes; I will stand against this tree. They'll probably pass without seeing us."

The man[oe]uvre was made with the rapidity of a military evolution, and none too soon; for the new-comer was seen to emerge from the darkness as the pair reached their posts. Rameau-d'or, whose eyes were by this time accustomed to the dim light, saw at once that he was a young man about twenty years of age, running, rather than walking, in the same direction as themselves. He had his hat in his hand, which made him the more easily recognized, and his hair, blown back by the wind, left his face entirely exposed.

An exclamation of surprise burst from Rameau-d'or, as the young man came close to him; then he hesitated a minute, still in doubt, and allowed the other to pass him by three or four steps, before he cried out: -

"Michel!"

The new-comer, who did not expect to hear his name called in that lonely place, jumped to one side, and said in a voice that quivered with emotion: -

"Who called me?"

"I," said Rameau-d'or, taking off his hat and a wig he had been wearing, and advancing to his friend with no other disguise than his Breton clothes.

"Henri de Bonneville!" exclaimed Baron Michel, in amazement.

"Myself. But don't say my name so loud. We are in a land where every bush and ditch and tree shares with the walls the privilege of having ears."

"True!" said Michel, alarmed; "and besides-"

"Besides what?" asked M. de Bonneville.

"You must have come for the uprising they talk of?"

"Precisely. And now, in two words, on which side are you?"

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"My good friend," said the young baron, "I have no fixed opinions; though I will admit in a whisper-"

"Whisper as much as you like; admit what? Make haste."

"Well, I will admit that I incline toward Henri V."

"My dear Michel," cried the count, gayly, "if you incline toward Henri V. that is enough for me."

"Stop; I don't say that I am positively decided."

"So much the better. I shall finish your conversion; and, in order that I may do so at once, I shall ask you to take me in for the night at your château, and also a friend who accompanies me."

"Where is your friend?" asked Michel.

"Here he is," said Petit-Pierre, riding forward, and bowing to the young baron, with an ease and grace that contrasted curiously with the dress he wore. Michel looked at the little peasant for a moment, and then approaching Bonneville, he said: -

"Henri, what is your friend's name?"

"Michel, you are lacking in all the traditions of hospitality. You forget the 'Odyssey,' my dear fellow, and I am distressed at you. Why do you want to know my friend's name? Isn't it enough if I tell you he is a man of good birth?"

"Are you sure he is a man at all?"

The count and Petit-Pierre burst out laughing.

"So you insist on knowing the names of those you receive in your house?"

"Not for my sake, my dear Henri, – not for mine, I swear to you; but in the château de la Logerie-"

"Well? – in the château de la Logerie?"

"I am not master."

"Oh! then the Baronne Michel is mistress. I had already told my little friend Petit-Pierre that she might be. But it is only for one night. You could take us to your own room, and I can forage in the cellar and larder. I know the way. My young friend could get a night's rest on your bed, and early in the morning I'll find a better place and relieve you of our presence."

"Impossible, Henri. Do not think that it is for myself, I fear; but it will compromise your safety to let you even enter the château."

"How so?"

"My mother is still awake; I am sure of it. She is watching for me; she would see us enter. Your disguise we might find some reason for; but that of your companion, which has not escaped me, how could we explain it to her?"

"He is right," said Petit-Pierre.

"But what else can we do?"

"And," continued Michel, "it is not only my mother that I fear, but-"

"What else?"

"Wait!" said the baron, looking uneasily about him; "let us get away from these bushes."

"The devil!"

"I mean Courtin."

"Courtin? Who is he?"

"Don't you remember Courtin the farmer?"

"Oh! yes, to be sure, – a good sort of fellow, who was always on your side, even against your mother."

"Yes. Well, Courtin is now mayor of the village and a violent Philippist. If he found you wandering about, at night in disguise he would arrest you without a warrant."

"This is serious," said Henri de Bonneville, gravely. "What does Petit-Pierre think of it?"

"I think nothing, my dear Rameau-d'or; I leave you to think for me."

"The result is that you close your doors to us?" said Bonneville.

"That won't signify to you," said Baron Michel, whose eyes suddenly lighted up with a personal hope, – "it won't signify, for I will get you admitted to another house, where you will be in far greater safety than at La Logerie."

"Not signify! but it does signify. What says my companion?"

"I say that provided some door opens, I don't care where it is. I am ready to drop with fatigue, I am so tired."

"Then follow me," said the baron.

"Is it far?"

"An hour's walk, – about three miles."

"Has Petit-Pierre the strength for it?" asked Henri.

"Petit-Pierre will find strength for it," said the little peasant, laughing.

"Then let us follow Baron Michel," said Bonneville. "Forward, baron!"

And the little group, which had been at a standstill for the last ten minutes, moved away. But they had hardly gone a few hundred steps before Bonneville laid a hand on Michel's shoulder.

"Where are you taking us?" he said.

"Don't be uneasy."

"I will follow you, provided you can promise me a good bed and a good supper for Petit-Pierre, who, as you see, is rather delicate."

"He shall have all and more than I could give him at La Logerie, – the best food in the larder, the best wine in the cellar, the best bed in the castle."

On they went. At the end of some little time Michel said suddenly: -

"I'll go forward now, so that you may not have to wait."

"One moment," said Henri. "Where are we going?"

"To the château de Souday."

"The château de Souday!"

"Yes; you know it very well, with its pointed towers roofed with slate, on the left of the road opposite to the forest of Machecoul."

"The wolves' castle?"

"Yes, the wolves' castle, if you choose to call it so."

"Is that where we are to stay?"

"Yes."

"Have you sufficiently reflected, Michel?"

"Yes, yes; I will answer for everything."

The baron waited to say no more, but set off instantly for the castle, with that velocity of which he had given such unmistakable proof on the night when he went to fetch the doctor to the dying Tinguy.

"Well," asked Petit-Pierre, "what shall we do?"

"There is no choice now but to follow him."

"To the wolves' castle?"

"Yes, to the wolves' castle."

"So be it; but to enliven the way," said the little peasant, "will you be good enough to tell me, my dear Rameau-d'or, who the wolves are?"

"I will tell you what I have heard of them."

"I can't expect more."

Resting his hand on the pommel of the saddle, the Comte de Bonneville related to Petit-Pierre the sort of legend attaching, throughout the department of the Lower Loire, to the daughters of the Marquis de Souday. But presently, stopping short in his tale, he announced to his companion that they had reached their destination.

Petit-Pierre, convinced that he was about to see beings analogous to the witches in "Macbeth," was calling up all his courage to enter the dreaded castle, when, at a turn of the road, he saw before him an open gate, and before the gate two white figures, who seemed to be waiting there, lighted by a torch carried behind them by a man of rugged features and rustic clothes. Mary and Bertha—for it was they—informed by Baron Michel, had come to meet their uninvited guests. Petit-Pierre eyed them curiously. He saw two charming young girls, – one fair, with blue eyes and an almost angelic face; the other, with black hair and eyes, a proud and resolute bearing, a frank and loyal countenance. Both were smiling.

Rameau-d'or's young companion slid from his horse, and the two advanced together toward the ladies.

"My friend Baron Michel encouraged me to hope, mesdemoiselles, that your father, the Marquis de Souday, would grant us hospitality," said the Comte de Bonneville, bowing to the two girls.

"My father is absent, monsieur," replied Bertha. "He will regret having lost this occasion to exercise a virtue which in these days we cannot often practise."

"I do not know if Michel told you, mademoiselle, that this hospitality may possibly involve some danger. My young companion and I are almost proscribed persons. Persecution may be the cost of your granting us an asylum."

"You come here in the name of a cause which is ours, monsieur. Were you merely strangers, you would be hospitably received. Being, as you are, royalists and proscribed, you are heartily welcome, even if death and ruin enter this poor household with you. If my father were here he would say the same."

"Monsieur le Baron Michel has, no doubt, told you my name; it remains for me to tell you that of my young companion."

"We do not ask to know it, monsieur; your situation is more to us than your names, whatever they may be. You are royalists, proscribed for a cause to which, women as we are, we would gladly give every drop of our blood. Enter this house; it is neither rich nor sumptuous, but at least you will find it faithful and discreet."

With a gesture of great dignity, Bertha pointed to the gate, and signed to the two young men to enter it.

"May Saint-Julien be ever blessed!" said Petit-Pierre in Bonneville's ear. "Here is the château and the cottage between which you wanted me to choose, united in this night's lodging. They please me through and through, your wolves."

So saying, he entered the postern, with a graceful inclination of the head to the two young girls. The Comte de Bonneville followed. Mary and Bertha made an amicable gesture of farewell to Michel, and the latter held out her hand to him. But Jean Oullier closed the gate so roughly that the luckless young man had no time to grasp it.

He looked for a few moments at the towers of the castle, which stood out blackly against the dark background of the sky. He watched the lights appearing, one by one, in the windows; and then, at last, he turned and went away.

When he had fairly disappeared the bushes moved, and gave passage to an individual who had witnessed this scene, with a purpose very different from that of the actors in it. That individual was Courtin, who, after satisfying himself that no one was near, took the same path his young master had taken to return to La Logerie.

XV. AN UNSEASONABLE HOUR

It was about two in the morning, perhaps, when the young Baron Michel again reached the end of the avenue, which leads to the château de la Logerie. The atmosphere was calm; the majestic silence of the night, which was broken only by the rustling of the leaves, led him into reverie. It is not necessary to say that the two sisters were the objects of his thought, and that the one whose image the baron followed with as much respect and love as Tobit followed the angel in the Bible, was Mary.

But when he saw before him, at the farther end of the dark arcade of trees beneath which he was walking, the windows of the château, which were sparkling in the moonlight, all his charming visions vanished, and his ideas took a far more practical direction. In place of the ravishing figures of girlhood so lately beside him, he saw the stern and threatening outline of his mother.

We know the terror with which she inspired him. He stopped short. If in all the neighborhood there were any shelter, even a tavern, in which he could spend the night, he would not have returned to the house till the next day, so great were his apprehensions. It was the first time he had ever been late in getting home, and he felt instinctively that his mother was on the watch for him. What should he answer to the dreadful inquiry, "Where have you been?"

Courtin could give him a night's lodging; but if he went to Courtin he should have to tell him all, and the young baron fully understood the danger there was in taking a man like Courtin into his confidence. He decided, therefore, to brave the maternal wrath, – very much as the criminal decides to brave the scaffold, simply because he cannot do otherwise, – and continued his way home.

Nevertheless, the nearer he got to the château the more his resolution faltered. When he reached the end of the avenue where he had to cross the lawn, and when he saw his mother's window, the only lighted window in the building, his heart failed him. No, his forebodings had not misled him; his mother was on the watch. His resolution vanished entirely, and fear, developing the resources of his imagination, put into his head the idea of a trick which, if it did not avert his mother's anger, would at any rate delay the explosion of it.

He turned to the right, glided along in the shadow of a buckthorn hedge, reached the wall of the kitchen garden, over which he climbed, and passed through the gate leading from the kitchen-garden to the park.

Up to this moment all was well; but now came the most difficult, or rather the most hazardous part of his enterprise. He had to find some window left unfastened by a careless servant, by which he could enter the house and slip back to his own apartment unperceived.

The château de la Logerie consists of a large, square building, flanked at the corners with four towers of the same shape. The kitchens and offices were underground, the reception-rooms on the ground-floor, those of the baroness on the next floor, those of her son above her. Michel examined the house on three sides, trying gently but persistently every door and window, keeping close to the walls, stepping with precaution, and even holding his breath. Neither doors nor windows yielded.

There was still the front of the house to be examined. This was much the most dangerous side, for the windows of the baroness commanded it, and there were no shrubs to cast a protecting shadow. Here he found a window open. True, it was that of his mother's bedroom; but Michel, now desperate, reflected that if he had to be scolded he would rather it were without than within the house, and he resolved on making the attempt.

He was cautiously advancing round the corner tower when he saw a shadow moving on the lawn. A shadow of course meant a body. Michel stopped and gave all his attention to the new arrival. He saw it was a man, and the man was following the path he himself would have taken had he gone, in the first instance, straight to the house. The young baron now made a few steps backward and crouched in the heavy shadow projected by the tower.

The man came nearer. He was not more than fifty yards from the house when Michel heard the harsh voice of his mother speaking from her window. He congratulated himself on not having crossed the lawn and taken the path the man was on.

"Is that you, Michel?" asked the baroness.

"No, madame, no," replied a voice, which the young baron recognized, with amazement not unmingled with fear, as that of Courtin, "you do me too much honor in taking me for Monsieur le baron."

"Good heavens!" cried the baroness, "what brings you here at this hour?"

"Ah! you may well suppose it is something important, Madame la baronne."

"Has any harm happened to my son?"

The tone of agony in which his mother said these words touched the young man so deeply that he was about to rush out and reassure her when Courtin's answer, which came immediately, paralyzed this good intention.

"Oh! no, no, madame; I have just seen the young *gars*, if I may so call Monsieur le baron, and he is quite well, – up to the present moment at least."

"Present moment!" said the baroness. "Is he in any danger?"

"Well, yes," said Courtin; "he may get into trouble if he persists in running after those female Satans, – and may hell clutch them! It is to prevent such a misfortune that I've taken the liberty to come to you at this time of night, feeling sure that as Monsieur Michel is so late in getting home you would surely be sitting up for him."

"You did right, Courtin. Where is he now, – do you know?"

Courtin looked about him.

"I am surprised he has not come in. I took the county road so as to leave him the wood-path clear, and that's a good half-mile shorter than the road."

"But tell me at once, where has he been; where is he coming from; what has he done; why is he roaming the country at two in the morning, without considering my anxiety or reflecting that he is injuring my health as well as his own?"

"Madame la baronne, I cannot answer those questions in the open air." Then, lowering his voice, he added, "What I have to tell madame is so important that she had better hear it in her own room. Besides, as the young master is not yet in, he may be here at any moment," said the farmer, looking uneasily about him, "and I wouldn't for all the world have him suspect that I keep a watch upon him, though it is for his own good, and to do you a service."

"Come in, then; you are right," said the baroness. "Come in, at once."

"Beg pardon, madame, but how, if you please?"

"True," said the baroness, "the door is locked."

"If madame will throw me the key–"

"It is inside the door."

"Oh, bother it!"

"I sent the servants to bed, not wishing them to know of my son's misconduct. Wait; I will ring for my maid."

"Oh, madame, no!" exclaimed Courtin, "it is better not to let any one into our secrets; it seems to me the matter is so important that madame might disregard appearances. I know madame was not born to open the door to a poor farmer like me; but once in a way it wouldn't signify. If everybody is asleep in the château, so much the better; we shall be safe from curiosity."

"Really, Courtin, you alarm me," said the baroness, who was in fact prevented from opening the door by a petty pride, which had not escaped the farmer's observation. "I will hesitate no longer."

The baroness withdrew from the window, and a moment later Michel heard the grinding of the key and the bolts of the front door. He listened at first in an agony of apprehension; then he became aware that the door, which opened with difficulty, had not been relocked or bolted, – no

doubt because his mother and Courtin were so pre-occupied in mind. He waited a few seconds till he was sure they had reached the upper floor. Then, gliding along the wall, he mounted the portico, pushed open the door, which turned noiselessly on its hinges, and entered the vestibule.

His original intention had been, of course, to regain his room and await events, while pretending to be asleep. In that case the exact hour of his return home would not be known, and he might still have a chance to get out of the scrape by a fib. But matters were much changed since he formed that intention. Courtin had followed him; Courtin had seen him. Courtin must know that the Comte de Bonneville and his companion had taken refuge in the château de Souday. For a moment Michel forgot himself to think of his friend, whom the farmer, with his violent political opinions, might greatly injure.

Instead of going up to his own floor, he slipped, like a wolf, along his mother's corridor. Just as he reached her door he heard her say: -

"So you really think, Courtin, that my son has been enticed by one of those miserable women?"

"Yes, madame, I am sure of it; and they've got him so fast that I am afraid you'll have a deal of trouble to get him away from them."

"Girls without a penny!"

"As for that, they come of the oldest blood in the country, madame," said Courtin, wishing to sound his way; "and for nobles like you that's something, at any rate."

"Faugh!" exclaimed the baroness; "bastards!"

"But pretty; one is like an angel, the other like a demon."

"Michel may amuse himself with them, as so many others, they say, have done; that's possible; but you can't suppose that he ever dreamed of marrying one of them? Nonsense! he knows me too well to think that I would ever consent to such a marriage."

"Barring the respect I owe to him, Madame la baronne, my opinion is that Monsieur Michel has never reflected at all about it, and doesn't yet know what he feels for the wolves; but one thing I'm sure of, and that is he is getting himself into another kind of trouble, which may compromise him seriously."

"What do you mean, Courtin?"

"Well, confound it!" exclaimed the farmer, seeming to hesitate, "do you know, madame, that it would be very painful to me, who love and respect you, if my duty compelled me to arrest my young master?"

Michel trembled where he stood; and yet it was the baroness to whom the shock was most severe.

"Arrest Michel!" she exclaimed, drawing herself up; "I think you forget yourself, Courtin."

"No, madame, I do not."

"But -"

"I am your farmer, it is true," continued Courtin, making the baroness a sign with his hand to control herself. "I am bound to give you an exact account of the harvests, on which you have half the profits, and to pay you promptly on the day and hour what is due, - which I do to the best of my ability, in spite of the hard times: but before being your farmer I am a citizen, and I am, moreover, mayor, and in those capacities I have duties, Madame la baronne, which I must fulfil, whether my poor heart suffers or not."

"What nonsense are you talking to me, Maître Courtin? Pray, what has my son to do with your duties as a citizen and your station as mayor?"

"He has this to do with it, Madame la baronne: your son has intimate acquaintance with the enemies of the State."

"I know very well," said the baroness, "that Monsieur le Marquis de Souday holds exaggerated opinions; but any love-affairs that Michel may have with one of his daughters cannot, it seems to me, be turned into a political misdemeanor."

"That love-affair is carrying Monsieur Michel much farther than you think for, Madame la baronne, and I tell you so now. I dare say he has so far only poked the end of his nose into the troubled waters about him; but that's enough for a beginning."

"Come, enough of such metaphors! Explain what you mean, Courtin."

"Well, Madame la baronne, here's the truth. This evening, after being present at the death-bed of that old Chouan Tinguy, and running the risk of bringing a malignant fever home with him, and after accompanying one of the wolves to the château de Souday, Monsieur le baron served as guide to two peasants who were no more peasants than I'm a gentleman; and he took them to the château de Souday."

"Who told you so, Courtin?"

"My own two eyes, Madame la baronne; they are good, and I trust them."

"Did you get an idea who those peasants were?"

"The two false peasants?"

"Yes, of course."

"One, I'd take my oath of it, was the Comte de Bonneville, – a violent Chouan, he! No one can fool me about him; he has been long in the country, and I know him. As for the other–"

Courtin paused.

"Go on," said the baroness, impatiently.

"As for the other, if I'm not mistaken, that's a better discovery still–"

"But who is it? Come, Courtin, tell me at once."

"No, Madame la baronne. I shall tell the name–I shall probably be obliged to do so–to the authorities."

"The authorities! Do you mean to tell me you are going to denounce my son?" cried the baroness, amazed and stupefied at the tone her farmer, hitherto so humble, was assuming.

"Assuredly I do, Madame la baronne," said Courtin, composedly.

"Nonsense! you would not think of it."

"I do think it, Madame la baronne, and I should be now on the road to Montaigu or even to Nantes, if I had not wished to warn you, so that you may put Monsieur Michel out of harm's way."

"But, supposing that Michel is concerned in this affair," said the baroness, vehemently; "you will compromise me with all my neighbors, and–who knows? – you may draw down horrible reprisals on La Logerie."

"Then we must defend the château, that's all, Madame la baronne."

"Courtin!"

"I saw the great war, Madame la baronne. I was a little fellow then, but I remember it, and on my word of honor I don't want to see the like again. I don't want to see my twenty acres of land a battlefield for both parties, my harvests eaten by one or burned by the other; still less do I want to see the Whites lay hands on the National domain, which they will do if they get the chance. Out of my twenty acres, five belonged to *émigrés*. I bought 'em and paid for 'em; that's one quarter of all I own. Besides, here's another thing: the government relies upon me, and I wish to justify the confidence of the government."

"But, Courtin," said the baroness, almost ready to come down to entreaty, "matters can't be as serious as you imagine, I am sure."

"Beg pardon, Madame la baronne, they are very serious indeed. I am only a peasant, but that doesn't prevent me from knowing as much as others know, being blessed with a good ear and a gift for listening. The Retz district is all but at the boiling-point; another fagot and the pot will boil over."

"Courtin, you must be mistaken."

"No, Madame la baronne, I am not mistaken. I know what I know. God bless me! the nobles have met three times, – once at the Marquis de Souday's, once at the house of the man they call Louis Renaud, and once at the Comte de Saint-Amand's. All those meetings smelt of powder, Madame la

baronne. *À propos* of powder, there's two hundred weight of it and sacks of cartridges in the Vicar of Montbert's house. Moreover, – and this is the most serious thing of all, – they are expecting Madame la Duchesse de Berry, and from something I have just seen, it is my opinion they won't have long to wait for her."

"Why so?"

"I think she is here already."

"Good God! where?"

"Well, at the château de Souday, where Monsieur Michel took her this evening."

"Michel! oh, the unfortunate boy! But you won't say a word about it, will you, Courtin? Besides, the government must have made its plans. If the duchess attempts to return to La Vendée, she will be arrested before she can get here."

"Nevertheless, she is here," persisted Courtin.

"All the more reason why you should hold your tongue."

"I like that! And what becomes of the profits and the glory of such a prize, not counting that before the capture is made by somebody else the whole country will be in blood and arms? No. Madame la baronne; no, I cannot hold my tongue."

"Then what is to be done? Good God! what can I do?"

"I'll tell you, Madame la baronne; listen to me-"

"Go on."

"Well, as I want to remain your zealous and faithful servant, all the while being a good citizen, – and because I hope that in gratitude for what I am doing for you, you will let me keep my farm on terms that I am able to pay, – I will agree to say nothing about Monsieur Michel. But you must try to keep him out of this wasps' nest in future. He is in it now, that's true; but there's still time to get him out."

"You need not trouble yourself about that, Courtin."

"But if I might say a word, Madame la baronne-"

"Well, what?"

"I don't quite dare to give advice to Madame la baronne; it is not my place, but-"

"Go on, Courtin; go on."

"Well, in order to get Monsieur Michel completely out of this hornets' nest, I think you'll have- by some means or other, prayers or threats- to make him leave la Logerie and go to Paris."

"Yes, you are right, Courtin."

"Only, I am afraid he won't consent."

"If I decide it, Courtin, he must consent."

"He will be twenty-one in eleven months; he is very nearly his own master."

"I tell you he shall go, Courtin. What are you listening for?"

Courtin had turned his head to the door, as if he heard something.

"I thought some one was in the corridor," he said.

"Look and see."

Courtin took a light and rushed into the passage.

"There was no one," he said, "though I certainly thought I heard a step."

"Where do you suppose he can be, the wretched boy, at this time of night?" said the baroness.

"Perhaps he has gone to my house," said Courtin. "He has confidence in me, and it wouldn't be the first time he has come to tell me of his little troubles."

"Possibly. You had better go home now; and remember your promise."

"And do you remember yours, Madame la baronne. If he comes in lock him up. Don't let him communicate with the wolves, for if he sees them-"

"What then?"

"I shouldn't be surprised to hear some day that he was firing behind the gorse."

"God forbid! Oh! he'll kill me with anxiety. What a luckless idea it was of my husband ever to come to this cursed place!"

"Luckless, indeed, madame, – especially for him."

The baroness bowed her head sadly under the recollections thus evoked. Courtin now left her, looking about him carefully to see that no one was stirring in the château de la Logerie.

XVI. COURTIN'S DIPLOMACY

Courtin had hardly taken a hundred steps on the path that led to his farmhouse before he heard a rustling in the bushes near which he passed.

"Who's there?" he said, standing in the middle of the path, and putting himself on guard with the heavy stick he carried.

"Friend," replied a youthful voice.

And the owner of the voice came through the bushes.

"Why, it is Monsieur le baron!" cried the farmer.

"I, myself, Courtin," replied Michel.

"Where are you going at this time of night? Good God! if Madame la baronne knew you were roaming about in the darkness, what do you suppose she would say?" said the farmer, pretending surprise.

"That's just it, Courtin."

"Hang it! I suppose Monsieur le baron has his reasons," said the farmer, in his jeering tone.

"Yes; and you shall hear them as soon as we get to your house."

"My house! Are you going to my house?" said Courtin, surprised.

"You don't refuse to take me in, do you?" asked Michel.

"Good heavens, no! Refuse to take you into a house which, after all, is yours?"

"Then don't let us lose time, it is so late. You walk first, I'll follow."

Courtin, rather uneasy at the imperative tone of his young master, obeyed. A few steps farther on he climbed a bank, crossed an orchard, and reached the door of his farmhouse. As soon as he entered the lower room, which served him as kitchen and living-room, he drew a few scattered brands together on the hearth and blew up a blaze; then he lighted a candle of yellow wax and stuck it on the chimney-piece. By the light of this candle he saw what he could not see by the light of the moon, – namely, that Michel was as pale as death.

"My God! what's the matter with you, Monsieur le baron?" he exclaimed.

"Courtin," said the young man, frowning, "I heard every word of your conversation with my mother."

"Confound it! were you listening?" said the farmer, a good deal surprised. But, recovering instantly, he added, "Well, what of it?"

"You want your lease renewed next year?"

"I, Monsieur le baron?"

"You, Courtin; and you want it much more than you choose to own."

"Of course I shouldn't be sorry to have it renewed, Monsieur le baron; but if there's any objection it wouldn't be the death of me."

"Courtin, I am the person who will renew your lease, because I shall be of age by that time."

"Yes, that's so, Monsieur le baron."

"But you will understand," continued the young man, to whom the desire of saving the Comte de Bonneville and staying near Mary gave a firmness and resolution quite foreign to his character, "you understand, don't you, that if you do as you said to-night, – that is, if you denounce my friends, – I shall most certainly not renew the lease of an informer?"

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Courtin.

"That is certain. Once out of this farm you may say good-bye to it, Courtin; you shall never return to it."

"But my duty to the government and Madame la baronne?"

"All that is nothing to me. I am Baron Michel de la Logerie; the estate and château de la Logerie belong to me; my mother resigns them when I come of age; I shall be of age in eleven months, and your lease falls in eight weeks later."

"But suppose I renounce my intention, Monsieur le baron?"

"If you renounce your intention, your lease shall be renewed."

"On the same conditions as before?"

"On the same conditions as before."

"Oh, Monsieur le baron, if I were not afraid of compromising you," said Courtin, fetching pen, ink, and paper from the drawer of a desk.

"What does all this mean?" demanded Michel.

"Oh, hang it! if Monsieur le baron would only have the kindness to write down what he has just said, – who knows which of us will die first? For my part, I am ready to swear, – here's a crucifix, – well, I swear by Christ–"

"I don't want your oaths, Courtin, for I shall go from here to Souday and warn Jean Oullier to be on his guard, and Bonneville to get another resting-place."

"So much the more reason," said Courtin, offering a pen to his young master.

Michel took the pen and wrote as follows on the paper which the farmer laid before him: –

"I, the undersigned, Auguste-François Michel, Baron de la Logerie, agree to renew the lease of farmer Courtin on the same conditions as the present lease."

Then, as he was about to date it, Courtin stopped him.

"Don't put the date, if you please, my young master," he said. "We will date it the day after you come of age."

"So be it," said Michel.

He then merely signed it, and left, between the pledge and the signature, a line to receive the future date.

"If Monsieur le baron would like to be more comfortable for the night than on that stool," said Courtin, "I will take the liberty to mention that there is, at his service upstairs, a bed that is not so bad."

"No," replied Michel; "did you not hear me say I was going to Souday?"

"What for? Monsieur le baron has my promise, I pledge him my word to say nothing. He has time enough."

"What you saw, Courtin, another may have seen. You may keep silence because you have promised it; but the other, who did not promise, will speak. Good-bye to you."

"Monsieur le baron will do as he likes," said Courtin; "but he makes a mistake, yes, a great mistake, in going back into that mouse-trap."

"Pooh! I thank you for your advice; but I am not sorry to let you know I am of an age now to do as I choose."

Rising as he said the words, with a firmness of which the farmer had supposed him incapable, he went to the door and left the house. Courtin followed him with his eyes till the door was closed; after which, snatching up the written promise, he read it over, folded it carefully in four, and put it away in his pocket-book. Then, fancying he heard voices at a little distance, he went to the window and, drawing back the curtain, saw the young baron face to face with his mother.

"Ha, ha, my young cockerel!" he said; "you crowed pretty loud with me, but there's an old hen who'll make you lower your comb."

The baroness, finding that her son did not return, thought that Courtin might be right when he suggested that Michel was possibly at the farmhouse. She hesitated a moment, partly from pride, partly from fear of going out alone at night; but, finally, her maternal uneasiness got the better of her reluctance, and wrapping herself in a large shawl, she set out for the farmhouse. As she approached the door her son came out of it. Then, relieved of her fears for his safety, and seeing him sound and well, her imperious nature reasserted itself.

Michel, for his part, on catching sight of his mother, made a step backward in terror.

"Follow me, sir," said the baroness. "It is not too early, I think, to return home."

The poor lad never once thought of arguing or resisting; he followed his mother passively and obediently as a child. Not a word was exchanged between mother and son the whole way. For that matter, Michel much preferred this silence to a discussion in which his filial obedience, or rather, let us say, his weak nature, would have had the worst of it.

When they reached the château day was breaking. The baroness, still silent, conducted the young man to his room. There he found a table prepared with food.

"You must be hungry and very tired," said the baroness. "There you have food, and here you can rest," she added, waving her hand to the table and the bed, after which she retired, closing the door after her.

The young man trembled as he heard the key turned twice in the lock. He was a prisoner! He fell helplessly into an arm-chair. Events were rushing on like an avalanche, and a more vigorous organization than that of Baron Michel might have given way under them. As it was, he had only a certain small amount of energy, and that was all expended in his interview with Courtin.

Perhaps he had presumed too much upon his strength when he told Courtin he should go to the château de Souday; at any rate, he was, as his mother said, tired out and very hungry. At Michel's age Nature is a mother, too, who will have her rights. Besides, a certain ease of mind had stolen over him. His mother's words, as she pointed to the table and the bed, seemed to imply that she did not mean to return until he had eaten and slept. It gave him some hours of calm before the storm of explanation.

Michel ate hastily, and then, after trying the door to make sure that he was really a prisoner, he went to bed and to sleep.

At ten o'clock he awoke. The beams of a splendid May sun were coming joyously through his windows. He opened the windows. The birds were singing in the branches, which were just then covered with their young and tender leafage. The roses were budding; the first butterflies were circling in the air. On such a day it seemed as though misfortune were imprisoned and could not come to any one. The young man found a sort of strength in this revival of Nature, and awaited the dreaded interview with his mother with more composure.

But the hours went by. Mid-day struck, and still the baroness did not appear. Michel then noticed, with a certain uneasiness, that the table had been amply supplied, not only for his supper of the night before, but also for the breakfast and dinner of the following day. He began to fear that his captivity might last much longer than he expected. This fear grew deeper as two and then three o'clock struck. He listened for every sound, and after a time he fancied he heard shots in the direction of Montaigu. These sounds had all the regularity of platoon firing, and yet it was impossible to say whether they came actually from a fusillade. Montaigu was six miles from La Logerie, and a distant thunderstorm might produce somewhat the same sounds.

But no! the sky was cloudless; there was no storm. The sounds lasted over an hour; then all was silent. The baron's uneasiness now became so great that he forgot to eat the food prepared for him. He resolved on one thing, – namely, as soon as night came and the people of the house were in bed he would cut out the lock of the door with his knife and leave the château, not by the front entrance, but by some window on the lower floor.

This possibility of flight restored the prisoner's appetite. He dined like a man who thinks he has a toilsome night before him, and who gathers strength to make head against it.

He finished his dinner about seven in the evening. It would be dusk in another hour. He flung himself on his bed and waited. He would fain have slept, for sleep would have shortened the time of waiting, but his mind was too uneasy. He closed his eyes, to be sure, but his ears, constantly alert, heard every sound. One thing surprised him much; he had seen nothing of his mother. She would certainly, he thought, expect him to do what he could to escape as soon as it was dark. No doubt she was planning something; but what could it be?

Suddenly Michel thought he heard the tinkling of bells which are usually fastened to the collars of post-horses. He ran to the window. He seemed to see, coming along the road from Montaigu, an indistinct group moving rapidly in the gathering darkness toward the château de la Logerie. The sound of horses' hoofs now mingled with the tinkling of the bells. Presently the postilion cracked his whip, probably to announce his coming. No doubt remained; it certainly was a postilion with post-horses on his way to the château.

Instinctively the young man looked toward the stables, and there he saw the servants dragging his mother's travelling-carriage from the coach-house. A flash of light came into his mind. These post-horses from Montaigu, the postilion cracking his whip, the travelling-carriage making ready for use, – no doubt, no doubt at all remained; his mother meant to leave La Logerie and take him with her. That was why she had locked him up and kept him a prisoner. She meant to come for him at the last moment, force him to get into the carriage with her, and away, away from everything he would be forced to go. She knew her ascendancy over her son sufficiently well to be certain he would not venture to resist her.

The consciousness that his mother had this conviction exasperated the young man all the more because he knew it was a true one. It was evident to his own mind that if the baroness once came face to face with him he would not dare to oppose her.

But to leave Mary, renounce that life of emotion to which the sisters had introduced him, to take no part in the drama which the Comte de Bonneville and his mysterious companion had come into La Vendée to play, seemed to him impossible and dishonoring. What would those young girls think of him?

Michel resolved to run all risks rather than endure the humiliation of their contempt.

He went to the window and measured with his eye the height from the ground; it was thirty feet. The young baron stood in thought for a moment. Evidently some great struggle was going on within him. At last it was decided. He went to his desk and took out a large sum of money in gold, with which he filled his pockets. Just then he thought he heard steps in the corridor. He hastily closed his desk and threw himself on his bed, expectant. An observer would have seen by the unusual firmness of the muscles of his face that his resolution was taken.

What was that resolution? In all probability we shall sooner or later discover what it was.

XVII. THE TAVERN OF AUBIN COURTE-JOIE

It was plain, – even to the authorities, who are usually the last to be informed as to the state of public opinion in the countries they are called upon to govern, – it was plain, we say, that an uprising was contemplated in Brittany and in La Vendée.

We have heard Courtin tell Madame de la Logerie of the meetings of the legitimist leaders. Those meetings were a secret to no one. The names of the new Bonchamps and Elbéés, who were to put themselves at the head of this last Vendéan struggle, were well-known and noted; the organizations of the former period into "parishes," "captaincies," and "divisions," were renewed; the priests refused to chant the *Domine salvum fac regem Philippum*, commending to the prayers of their people Henri V., king of France, and Marie-Caroline, regent. In short, in all the departments bordering on the Loire, particularly those of the Lower Loire and of the Maine-et-Loire, the air was filled with that smell of powder which precedes, as a general thing, all great political convulsions.

In spite of this wide-spread fermentation, – perhaps in consequence of it, – the fair at Montaigu promised to be very brilliant. Although it was usually of small importance, the influx of peasants on this occasion was considerable. The men from the high lands of Mauges and Retz rubbed shoulders with those from the Bocage and the plain; and the warlike inclination of all these country-folk was manifested by the prevalence of broad-brimmed hats and long-haired heads, and the absence of caps. In fact, the women, who were usually the majority in these commercial assemblies, did not come, on this occasion, to the Montaigu fair.

Moreover, – and this alone would have sufficed to show the incipient state of things to the least observing person, – though customers were plentiful at the fair of Montaigu, horses, cows, sheep, butter, and corn, which constituted the ordinary traffic, were conspicuously absent. The peasants, whether they came from Beaupréau, Mortagne, Bressuire, Saint-Fulgent, or Machecoul, carried in place of their usual marketable produce nothing but stout cudgels of dogwood tipped with iron, and by the way they grasped them it was plain enough that they meant to do business of that kind.

The market-place and the main (and only) street in Montaigu, which were used as the fairground, had a serious, almost threatening, and certainly solemn aspect, which is not usual in such assemblages. A few jugglers, a few vendors of quack medicines, a few teeth-pullers tapped their boxes, blew their bugles, clanged their gongs, and vaunted their trades facetiously to no purpose; frowns continued on the anxious faces that passed them by without deigning to listen to their music or their chatter.

The people of La Vendée, like their neighbors of the North, the Bretons, talk but little. On this occasion they talked less than ever. Most of them stood with their backs against the houses or the garden walls or the wooden bars that inclosed the market-place, and there they stood, motionless, their legs crossed, their heads under their broad hats inclining forward, and their hands leaning on their sticks, like so many statues. Some were gathered in little groups, and these groups, which seemed to be awaiting something, were, strange to say, as silent as the solitary individuals.

The crowds were great in the drinking-shops. Cider, brandy, and coffee were dispensed there in vast quantities; but the constitution of the Vendéan peasant is so robust that the enormous quantities of liquor absorbed had no visible influence on the faces and conduct of any of them. Their color might be a little higher, their eyes more brilliant, but the men were masters of themselves, and all the more so because they distrusted those who kept the wineshops, and the village folk whom they met there. In the towns and villages along the great high-roads of La Vendée and Brittany the minds of the inhabitants were, as a general thing, awakened to ideas of progress and liberty; but these sentiments, which cooled at a little distance, disappeared altogether when the interior country districts were reached.

Consequently, all the inhabitants of the chief centres of population, unless they had given unequivocal proofs of devotion to the royal cause, were classed as "patriots" by the peasantry; and patriots were to the peasants enemies, to whom they attributed all the evils resulting from the great insurrection, hating them with that deep, undying hatred which characterizes civil and religious warfare.

In coming to the fair at Montaigu—a centre of population, and occupied at this time by a company of some hundred or so of Mobile guards—the inhabitants of the country districts had penetrated to the very centre of their enemies. They understood this thoroughly, and that is why they maintained under a pacific demeanor the reserve and vigilance of soldiers under arms.

Only one of the numerous drinking-shops of Montaigu was kept by a man on whom the Vendéans could rely, and before whom, consequently, they discarded all constraint. His tavern was in the centre of the town, on the fairground itself, at the corner of the market-place and a side alley leading, not to another street nor to the fields, but to the river Maine, which skirts the town to the southeast.

The tavern had no sign. A branch of dry holly, stuck horizontally into a crack of the wall, and a few apples, seen through window-panes so covered with dust that no curtain was needed, informed all strangers of the nature of the establishment. As for its regular customers, they needed no indications.

The proprietor of this tavern was named Aubin Courte-Joie. Aubin was his family name; Courte-Joie was a nickname, which he owed to the jeering propensities of his friends. He came by it in this way. The part, insignificant as it is, which Aubin Courte-Joie plays in this history obliges us to say a word on his antecedents.

At twenty years of age Aubin was so frail, debilitated, and sickly, that even the conscription, which did not look very closely into such matters, rejected him as unfit for the favors which his Imperial and Royal Majesty bestowed upon his conscripts. But in 1814 this same conscription, having then aged by two years, was less fastidious, and came to the conclusion that what it had so far considered an abortion was at any rate a numerical figure, somewhere between a one and a nought, and could, if only on paper, contribute to the terrifying of the kings of Europe. Consequently, the conscription laid hands on Aubin.

But Aubin, whom the original disdain manifested by the authorities toward his person had alienated from all desire for military glory, resolved to desert the government, and taking to flight he connected himself with one of those bands of refractories (as recalcitrant conscripts were then called) who roamed the interior of the country. The less plentiful recruits became, the more pitiless grew the agents of imperial authority.

Aubin, whom Nature had not endowed with excessive conceit, would never have thought himself so necessary to the government if he had not seen with his own eyes the trouble that the government took to hunt for him through the forests of Brittany and the bogs of La Vendée. The *gendarmes* were active in their pursuit of refractories.

In one of the encounters that resulted from this pursuit, Aubin had used his gun with a courage and tenacity which proved that the conscription of 1814 was not altogether wrong in wishing to lay hands on him as one of its elect, — in one of these encounters, we were about to say, Aubin was hit by a ball and left for dead in the roadway.

On that day a bourgeoisie of Ancenis took the road by the river bank, which leads from Ancenis to Nantes. She was in her carriage, and it might be about eight or nine o'clock at night; at any rate, it was dusk. When she came to the body the horse shuddered in the shafts and refused to go on. She whipped him, he reared. On further whipping, the animal tried to turn short round and go back to Ancenis. His mistress, who had never known him to behave in that way before, got out of her carriage. All was then explained. Aubin's body lay across the road.

Such encounters were not infrequent in those days. The bourgeoisie was only slightly alarmed. She fastened her horse to a tree, and began to drag Aubin's body into the ditch, to make room for her

vehicle and others that might pass that way. But she had no sooner touched the body than she found it warm. The motion she gave to it, perhaps the pain of the motion, brought Aubin to his senses; he gave a sigh and moved his arms.

The end of it was that, instead of putting him into the ditch, the bourgeoisie put him into her carriage; and instead of continuing her way to Nantes she returned to Ancenis. The good dame was pious and a royalist. The cause for which Aubin was wounded, the scapulary she found on his breast, interested her deeply. She sent for a surgeon. The luckless Aubin had both legs fractured by one shot; it was necessary to amputate them. The worthy woman nursed him and took care of him with all the devotion of a sister of charity. Her good deed, as often happens, attached her to the object of it, and when Aubin was once more well in health it was with the utmost astonishment that he received an offer of her heart and hand. Needless to say that Aubin accepted.

Thenceforth Aubin became, to the stupefaction of all the country round one of the small proprietors of the canton. But, alas! his joy was of short duration. His wife died within a year. She had taken the precaution to make a will, leaving him all her property; but her natural heirs attacked it for some error of form, and the court at Nantes having decided in their favor, the poor ex-recruit was no better off than before his luck happened to him. It was in reference to the short duration of his opulence that the inhabitants of Montaigu, who were not, as will be imagined, without envy at his rise or rejoicing at his fall, bestowed upon him the significant addition of Courte-Joie (Short-Joy) to his proper name.

Now, the heirs who had managed to set aside the will belonged to the liberal party. Aubin could not, therefore, do less than vent upon that party in general the anger that the loss of his property excited in him. He did so, and he did it conscientiously. Soured by his infirmities, embittered by what seemed to him a horrible injustice, Aubin Courte-Joie felt to all those whom he blamed for his fortunes-judges, patriots, and adversaries-a savage hatred. Public events had encouraged this hatred, and it was now awaiting a favorable moment to convert itself into deeds which the sullen and vindictive nature of the man would undoubtedly render terrible.

With his twofold infirmity it was impossible for Aubin to go back to his old life and become a farmer and tiller of the ground like his father and grandfather before him. He was compelled, therefore, much against his will, to live in a town. Gathering up the fragments of his lost opulence he came to live in the midst of those he hated most, at Montaigu itself, where he kept the tavern in which we find him eighteen years after the events we have just recorded.

In 1832 there was not in all La Vendée a more enthusiastic adherent to royalist opinions than Aubin Courte-Joie. In serving that cause was he not fulfilling a personal vengeance? Aubin Courte-Joie was, in spite of his two wooden legs, the most active and intelligent agent in the uprising which was now being organized. Standing sentinel in the midst of the enemy's camp, he kept the Vendéan leaders informed of all the government preparations for defence, not only in the canton of Montaigu, but also throughout the adjoining districts.

The tramps who roamed the country-those customers of a day, whom other tavern-keepers considered of no profit and paid no heed to-were in his hands marvellous auxiliaries, whom he kept employed in a circuit of thirty miles. He used them as spies, and also as messengers to and from the inhabitants of the country districts. His tavern was the rendezvous of all those who were distinctively called Chouans. It was the only one, as we have said, where they were not obliged to repress their royalist sentiments.

On the day of the fair at Montaigu Aubin Courte-Joie's drinking-shop did not at first sight seem so full of customers as might have been expected from the great influx of country people. In the first of the two rooms, a dark and gloomy apartment, furnished with an unpolished wooden counter and a few benches and stools, not more than a dozen peasants were assembled. By the cleanliness, we might say the nicety of their clothes, it was plain that these peasants belonged to the upper class of farmers.

This first room was separated from the second by a glass partition, behind which was a cotton curtain with large red and white squares. The second room served as kitchen, dining-room, bedroom, and office, becoming also, on great occasions an annex to the common hall; it was where Aubin Courte-Joie received his special friends.

The furniture of this room showed its quintuple service. At the farther end was a very low bed, with a tester and curtains of green serge; this was evidently the couch of the legless proprietor. It was flanked by two huge hogsheads, from which brandy and cider were drawn on demand of customers. To right, on entering, was the fireplace, with a wide, high chimney-piece like those of cottages. In the middle of the room was an oak table with wooden benches on each side of it. Opposite to the fireplace stood a dresser with crockery and tin utensils. A crucifix surmounted by a branch of consecrated holly, a few wax figurines of a devotional character coarsely colored, constituted the decoration of the apartment.

On this occasion Aubin Courte-Joie had admitted to this sanctuary a number of his numerous friends. In the outer room there were, as we have said, not more than a dozen; but at least a score were in the second. Most of these were sitting round the table drinking and talking with great animation. Three or four were emptying great bags piled up in one corner of the room and containing large, round sea-biscuits; these they counted and put in baskets, giving the baskets to tramps or women who stood by an outer door in the corner of the room behind the cider cask. This door opened upon a little courtyard, which itself opened into the alley-way leading to the river, which we have already mentioned.

Aubin Courte-Joie was seated in a sort of arm-chair under the mantel-shelf of the chimney. Beside him was a man wearing a goatskin garment and a black woollen cap, in whom we may recognize our old friend Jean Oullier, with his dog lying at his feet between his legs. Behind them Courte-Joie's niece, a young and handsome peasant girl, whom the tavern-keeper had taken to do the serving of his business, was stirring the fire and watching some dozen brown cups in which was gently simmering in the heat from the hearth what the peasants call "a roast of cider."

Aubin Courte-Joie was talking eagerly in a low voice to Jean Oullier, when a slight whistle, like the frightened cry of a partridge, came from the outer room.

"Who came in?" said Courte-Joie, looking through a peephole he had made in the curtain. "The man from La Logerie. Attention!"

Even before this order was given to those whom it concerned, all was still and orderly in Courte-Joie's sanctum. The outer door was gently closed; the women and the tramps disappeared; the men who were counting the biscuits had closed and turned over their sacks, and were sitting on them, and smoking their pipes in an easy attitude. As for the men drinking at the table, three or four had suddenly gone to sleep as if by enchantment. Jean Oullier turned round toward the hearth, thus concealing his face from the first glance of any one entering the apartment.

XVIII. THE MAN FROM LA LOGERIE

Courtin, – for it was he whom Courte-Joie designated as the man from La Logerie, – Courtin had entered the outer room. Except for the little cry of warning, so well imitated that it was really like the cry of a frightened partridge, no one appeared to take any notice of his presence. The men who were drinking continued their talk, although, serious as their manner was when Courtin entered, it now became suddenly very gay and noisy.

The farmer looked about him, but evidently did not find in the first room the person he wanted, for he resolutely opened the door of the glass partition and showed his sneaking face on the threshold of the inner room. There again, no one seemed to notice him. Mariette alone, Aubin Courte-Joie's niece, who was waiting on the customers, withdrew her attention from the cider cups, and looking at Courtin said, as she would have done to any of her uncle's guests: -

"What shall I bring you, Monsieur Courtin?"

"Coffee," replied Courtin, inspecting the faces that were round the table and in the corners of the room.

"Very good; sit down," said Mariette. "I'll bring it to your seat presently."

"That's not worth while," replied Courtin, good-humoredly; "pour it out now. I'll drink it here in the chimney-corner with the friends."

No one seemed to object to this qualification; but neither did any one stir to make room for him. Courtin was therefore obliged to make further advances.

"Are you well, *gars* Aubin?" he asked, addressing the tavern-keeper.

"As you see," replied the latter, without turning his head.

It was obvious to Courtin that he was not received with much good-will; but he was not a man to disconcert himself for a trifle like that.

"Here, Mariette," said he, "give me a stool, that I may sit down near your uncle."

"There are no stools left, Maître Courtin," replied the girl. "I should think your eyes were good enough to see that."

"Well, then, your uncle will give me his," continued Courtin, with audacious familiarity, though at heart he felt little encouraged by the behavior of the landlord and his customers.

"If you will have it," grumbled Aubin Courte-Joie, "you must, being as how I am master of the house, and it shall never be said that any man was refused a seat at the Holly Branch when he wanted to sit down."

"Then give me your stool, as you say, smooth-tongue, for there's the very man I'm after, right next to you."

"Who's that?" said Aubin, rising; and instantly a dozen other stools were offered.

"Jean Oullier," replied Courtin; "and it's my belief that here he is."

Hearing his name, Jean Oullier rose and said, in a tone that was almost menacing: -

"What do you want with me?"

"Well, well! you needn't eat me up because I want to see you," replied the mayor of la Logerie. "What I have to say is of more importance to you than it is to me."

"Maître Courtin," said Jean Oullier, in a grave tone, "whatever you may choose to pretend, we are not friends; and what's more, you know it so well that you have not come here with any good intentions."

"Well, you are mistaken, *gars* Oullier."

"Maître Courtin," continued Jean Oullier, paying no attention to the signs which Aubin Courte-Joie made, exhorting him to prudence, "Maître Courtin, ever since we have known each other you have been a Blue, and you bought bad property."

"Bad property!" exclaimed Courtin, with his jeering smile.

"Oh! I know what I mean, and so do you. I mean ill-gotten property. You've been hand and glove with the curs of the towns; you have persecuted the peasantry and the villagers, – those who have kept their faith in God and the king. What is there in common between you, who have done all that, and me, who have done just the reverse?"

"True," replied Courtin, "true, *gars* Oullier, I have not navigated in your waters; but, for all that, I say that neighbors ought not to wish the death of each other. I have come in search of you to do you a service; I'll swear to that."

"I don't want your services, Maître Courtin," replied Jean Oullier.

"Why not?" persisted the farmer.

"Because I am certain they hide some treachery."

"So you refuse to listen to me?"

"I refuse," replied the huntsman, roughly.

"You are wrong," said Aubin Courte-Joie, in a low voice; for he thought the frank, outspoken rudeness of his friend a mistaken man[oe]uvre.

"Very good," said Courtin; "then remember this. If harm comes to the inhabitants of the château de Souday, you have nobody to thank but yourself, *gars* Oullier."

There was evidently some special meaning in Courtin's manner of saying the word "inhabitants;" "inhabitants" of course included guests. Jean Oullier could not mistake this meaning, and in spite of his habitual self-command he turned pale. He regretted he had been so decided, but it was dangerous now to retrace his steps. If Courtin had suspicions, such a retreat would confirm them. He therefore did his best to master his emotion, and sat down again, turning his back on Courtin with an indifferent air; in fact, his manner was so careless that Courtin, sly dog as he was, was taken in by it. He did not leave the tavern as hastily as might have been expected after delivering his warning threat; on the contrary, he searched his pockets a long time to find enough change to pay for his coffee. Aubin Courte-Joie understood the meaning of this by-play, and profited by Courtin's lingering to put in a word himself.

"My good Jean," he said, addressing Jean Oullier in a hearty way, "we have long been friends, and have followed the same road for many years, I hope—here are two wooden legs that prove it. Well, I am not afraid to say to you, before Monsieur Courtin, that you are wrong, don't you see, wrong! So long as a hand is closed none but a fool will say, 'I know what is in it.' It is true that Monsieur Courtin" (Aubin Courte-Joie punctiliously gave that title to the mayor of la Logerie) "has never been one of us; but neither has he been against us. He has been for himself, and that is all the blame we can put upon him. But nowadays, when quarrels are over and there are neither Blues nor Chouans any more, to-day when, thank God, there's peace in the land, what does the color of his cockade signify to you? Faith! if Monsieur Courtin has, as he says, something useful to tell you it seems to me a pity not to hear it."

Jean Oullier shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Old fox!" thought Courtin, who was far too well informed as to the real state of things to be taken in by the pacific flowers of rhetoric with which Aubin Courte-Joie thought proper to wreath his remarks. But aloud he said, "All the more because what I have to say has nothing to do with politics."

"There! you see," said Courte-Joie, "there is no reason why you should not talk with the mayor. Come, come, sit down here and have a talk with him at your ease."

All this made no difference in Jean Oullier, who was neither mollified toward Courtin, nor did he even turn his head; only, when the mayor sat down beside him he did not get up and walk away, as might have been expected.

"*Gars* Oullier," said Courtin, by way of preamble, "I think talks are all the better for being moistened. 'Wine is the honey of words,' as our vicar says, – not in his sermons, but that don't make it less true. If we drink a bottle together perhaps that will sweeten our ideas."

"As you please," replied Jean Oullier, who, while feeling the strongest repugnance to hob-nob with Courtin, regarded the sacrifice as necessary to the cause he had at heart.

"Have you any wine?" said Courtin to Mariette.

"What a question!" she exclaimed. "Have we any wine, indeed! I should think so!"

"Good wine, I mean; sealed bottles."

"Sealed bottles, yes," said Mariette, proudly; "but they cost forty sous each."

"Pooh!" said Aubin, who had seated himself in the other chimney-corner to catch, if he could, some scraps of the promised communication, "the mayor is a man who has got the wherewithal, my girl, and forty sous won't prevent his paying his rent to Madame la Baronne Michel."

Courtin regretted his show of liberality; if the days of the old war were really coming back it might be dangerous to pass for rich.

"Wherewithal!" he exclaimed; "how you talk, *gars* Aubin! Yes, certainly, I have enough to pay my rent, but that paid I consider myself a lucky man if I can make both ends meet; that's my wealth!"

"Whether you are rich or poor is none of our business," remarked Jean Oullier. "Come, what have you to say to me? Make haste."

Courtin took the bottle which Mariette now brought him, wiped the neck of it carefully with his sleeve, poured a few drops into his own glass, filled that of Jean Oullier, then his own, touched glasses, and slowly emptied his.

"No one is to be pitied," he said, smacking his lips, "if they can drink such wine as that every day."

"Especially if they drink it with a clear conscience," added Jean Oullier. "In my opinion that's what makes wine taste good."

"Jean Oullier," said Courtin, without noticing the philosophical reflection of his companion, "you bear me ill-will, and you are wrong. On my word of honor, you are wrong."

"Prove it, and I'll believe you. That's all the confidence I have in you."

"I don't wish you harm; I wish good for myself, as Aubin Courte-Joie, who is a man of judgment, said just now; but you don't call that a crime, I hope. I mind my own little matters without meddling much in other people's business, because, as I say to myself, 'My good fellow, if at Easter or Christmas you haven't got your money ready in your pouch the king, be he Henri V. or Louis Philippe, will send the Treasury after you, and you'll get a paper in his name, which may be an honor, but it will cost you dear.' You reason differently; that's your affair. I don't blame you, – at the most I only pity you."

"Keep your pity for others, Maître Courtin," replied Jean Oullier, haughtily; "I don't want it any more than I want your confidences."

"When I say I pity you, *gars* Oullier, I mean your master as well as yourself. Monsieur le marquis is a man I respect. He fought through the great war. Well, what did he gain by it?"

"Maître Courtin, you said you were not going to talk politics, and you are breaking your word."

"Yes, I did say so, that's true; but it is not my fault if in this devilish country politics are so twisted in with everybody's business that the one can't be separated from the other. As I was saying, *gars* Oullier, Monsieur le marquis is a man I respect, and I am very sorry, very sorry indeed, to see him ridden over by a lot of common rich folks, – he who used to be the first in the province."

"If he is satisfied with his lot why need you care?" replied Jean Oullier. "You never heard him complain; he has never borrowed money of you."

"What would you say to a man who offered to restore to the château de Souday all the wealth and consideration it has lost? Come," continued Courtin, not hindered by the coldness of the Chouan, "do you think that a man who is ready to do *that* can be your enemy? Don't you think, on the contrary, that Monsieur le marquis would owe him a debt of gratitude? There, now, answer that question squarely and honestly, as I have spoken to you."

"Of course he would, if the man you speak of did what you say by honest means; but I doubt it."

"Honest means! Would any one dare propose to you any that were not honest? See here, my *gars*! I'll out with it at once, and not take all day and many words to say it. I can, – yes, I, who speak to you, – I can make the money flow into the château de Souday, as it hasn't done of late years; only–"

"Only–yes, that's it; only what? Ha! that's where the collar galls."

"Only, I was going to say, I must get my profit out of it."

"If the matter is an honest one, that's only fair; you will certainly get your part."

"That's all I want to know to set the wheel in motion, – and it's little enough, too."

"Yes; but what is it you are after? What is it you ask?" returned Jean Oullier, now very curious to know what was in Courtin's head.

"Oh! it is just as simple as nothing. In the first place, I want it so arranged that I needn't renew my lease or have any rent to pay for twelve years to come on the farm I occupy."

"In other words, you want a present?"

"If Monsieur de Souday offers it I shall not refuse, you understand. Of course I shouldn't be such a fool as to stand in my own light."

"But how can it be arranged? Your farm belongs to young Michel or his mother. I have not heard that they want to sell it. How can any man give you that which he doesn't possess?"

"Oh!" said Courtin, "if I interfere in the matter I speak of perhaps that farm may soon belong to some of you, and then it would be easy enough. What do you say?"

"I say I don't understand what you are talking about, Maître Courtin."

"Nonsense! Ha, ha! but it isn't a bad match for our young man. Don't you know that besides La Logerie he owns the estate of la Coudraie, the mills at La Ferronnerie, the woods of Gervaise, all of which bring in, one year with another, a pretty sum of money? And I can tell you this, the old baroness has laid by as much more, which he will get at her death."

"What has that Michel youth to do with the Marquis de Souday? they have nothing in common," said Jean Oullier. "And why should the property of your master be of any interest to mine?"

"Come, come, let's play above-board, *gars* Oullier. Damn it! you must have seen that our young man is sweet upon one of your young ladies, very sweet, indeed! Which of them it is, I can't tell you; but let Monsieur le marquis just say the word and sign me a paper about that farm, and the minute the girl, whichever it is, is married, – they are as smart as flies, those two, – she can manage her husband as she likes and get all she wants. He'll never refuse her a few acres of ground, especially when she wants to give them to a man to whom he'll be grateful, too. In this way I kill two birds with one stone, do your business and my own too. There is but one obstacle, and that's the mother. Well," added Courtin, leaning close to Oullier's ear, "I'll undertake to get rid of that."

Jean Oullier made no answer; but he looked fixedly at his companion.

"Yes," continued the latter, "if everybody wishes it, Madame la baronne won't be able to refuse it. I'll tell you this, Oullier," added Courtin, striking the other familiarly on the knee, "I know the whole story of Monsieur Michel."

"Why should you want our help, then? What hinders you from getting all you want out of her without delay?"

"What hinders me is this: I want to add to the word of a youth who, while keeping his sheep, heard a treacherous bargain made, – I want to add to his word the testimony of the man who was in the woods of La Chabotière some forty years ago, and saw the price of that bloody and treacherous bargain paid. You know best who saw that sight and who can give that testimony, *gars* Oullier. If you and I make common cause, the baroness will be as supple as a handful of flax. She is miserly, but she is also proud; the fear of public dishonor and the gossip of the neighborhood will make her docile enough. She'll see that, after all, Mademoiselle de Souday, poor and illegitimate as she is, is more than a match for the son of Baron Michel, whose grandfather was a peasant like ourselves, and whose father the baron was–you know what. Enough! Your young lady will be rich, our young man

will be happy, and I shall be very glad. What objection can be offered to all that? – not to speak of our becoming friends, *gars* Oullier; and I think my friendship is worth something to you, I must say."

"Your friendship?" replied Jean Oullier, who had repressed with great difficulty the indignation he felt at the singular proposal that Courtin had just made to him.

"Yes, my friendship," returned the latter. "You needn't shake your head like that. I have told you that I know more than any man about the life of Baron Michel; I will add that I know more than any man but one about his death. I was one of the beaters of the drive at which he was killed, and my post placed me just opposite to him. I was young, and even then I had a habit (which God preserve to me) of not gabbling unless it were my interest to do so. Now, then, do you think my services to your party of no account if my interests take me over to your side?"

"Maître Courtin," replied Jean Oullier, frowning, "I have no influence on the plans and determinations of the Marquis de Souday, but if I had any at all, even the smallest, never should that farm of yours come into the family; and if it did come in, never should it serve as the price of treachery."

"Fine words, all that!" exclaimed Courtin.

"No; poor as the Demoiselles de Souday may be, never do I want either of them to marry the young man you speak of. Rich as he may be, and even if he bore another name than he does, no Demoiselle de Souday could buy her marriage by a base act."

"You call that a base act, do you? I call it a good stroke of business."

"It may be so for you; but for those I serve, a marriage with Monsieur Michel, bought through you, would be more than a base act; it would be an infamy."

"Take care, Jean Oullier. I want to act a kind part, and I won't let myself quarrel with the label you choose to stick upon my acts. I came here with good intentions; it is for you not to let me leave this place with bad ones."

"I care as little for your threats as I do for your our proposals, Courtin; remember that. But if you force me to repeat it I shall say it to the end of time."

"Once more, Jean Oullier, listen to me. I will admit to you that I want to be rich. That is my whim, just as it is yours to be faithful as a dog to folks who don't care more for you than you do for your terrier. I thought I could be useful to your master, and I hoped he would not let my services go without reward. You say it is impossible. Then we'll say no more about it. But if the nobles whom you serve wished to show their gratitude to me in the way I ask I would rather do a service to them than to others; and I desire to tell you so once more."

"Because you think that nobles would pay more for it than others. Isn't that it?"

"Undoubtedly, *gars* Oullier. I don't conceal anything from you, and I'll repeat that, as you say, to the end of time."

"I shall not make myself the go-between in any such bargain, Maître Courtin. Besides, I have no power in the matter, and anything I could do for you is so small it isn't worth talking about."

"Hey, how do you know that? You didn't know, my *gars*, that I knew all about what happened in the wood at Chabotière. Perhaps I could astonish you if I told you all I know."

Jean Oullier was afraid of appearing afraid.

"Come," said he, "enough of this. If you want to sell yourself apply to others. Such bargains are hateful to me, even if I had any means of making them. They don't concern me, God be thanked."

"Is that your last word, Jean Oullier?"

"My first and my last. Go your ways, Maître Courtin, and leave me to mine."

"So much the worse for you," said Courtin, rising; "but, on my word, I would gladly have gone your way."

So saying, he nodded to Jean Oullier and went out. He had hardly crossed the threshold before Aubin Courte-Joie, stumping along on his wooden legs, came close to Jean Oullier.

"You have done a foolish thing," he whispered.

"What ought I to have done?"

"Taken him to Louis Renaud or to Gaspard; they would have bought him."

"Him, – that wicked traitor?"

"My good Jean, in 1815, when I was mayor, I went to Nantes, and there I saw a man named – , who was, or had been, a minister; and I heard him say two things I have always remembered. One was that traitors make and unmake empires; the other was that treachery is the only thing in this world that is not to be measured by the size of him who makes it."

"What do you advise me to do now?"

"Follow and watch him."

Jean Oullier reflected a moment. Then he rose.

"I think you are right," he said.

And he went out anxiously.

XIX. THE FAIR AT MONTAIGU

The effervescent state of minds in the west of France did not take the government unawares. Political faith had grown too lukewarm to allow a probable uprising, covering so large an extent of territory and involving so many conspirators, to remain long a secret.

Some time before Madame's arrival off the coast of Provence the authorities in Paris knew of the projected scheme, and repressive measures both prompt and vigorous had been arranged. No sooner was it evident that the princess was making her way to the western provinces than it was only a question of carrying out those measures and of putting the execution of them into safe and able hands.

The departments whose uprising was expected were divided into as many military districts as there were sub-prefectures. Each of these arrondissements, commanded by a chief of battalion, was the centre of several secondary cantonments commanded by captains, around which several minor detachments were encamped under command of lieutenants and sub-lieutenants, serving as guards and outposts into the interior districts as far as the safety of communications would permit.

Montaigu, in the arrondissement of Clisson, had its garrison, which consisted of a company of the 32d regiment of the line. The day on which the events we have now related occurred this garrison had been reinforced by two brigades of gendarmerie, which had reached Nantes that morning, and about a score of mounted chasseurs. The chasseurs were serving as escort to a general officer from the garrison at Nantes, who was on a tour of inspection of the various detachments. This was General Dermoncourt.

The inspection of the Montaigu garrison was over. Dermoncourt, a veteran as intelligent as he was energetic, thought it would not be out of place to inspect those whom he called his old Vendéan friends, now swarming into the streets and market-place of the town. He accordingly took off his uniform, put on citizen's clothes, and mingled with the crowds, accompanied by a member of the civil administration who happened to be at Montaigu at that moment.

The general bearing of the population though lowering was calm. The crowd opened to allow passage to the two gentlemen, and, although the martial carriage of the general, his heavy moustache, black, in spite of his sixty years, his scarred face, and the self-sufficient air of his companion, excited the inquisitive curiosity of the multitude, no hostile demonstration was made to them.

"Well, well," said the general, "my old friends the Vendéans are not much changed. I find them as uncommunicative as I left them thirty-eight years ago."

"To me such indifference seems a favorable sign," said the civil administrator, in a pompous tone. "The two months I have just passed in Paris, where there was a riot every day, gave me an experience in such matters, and I think I may safely assert that these people here show no signs of insurrection. Remark, general, that there are no knots of talkers, no orators in full blast, no animation, no mutterings; all is perfectly quiet. Come, come! these people are here for their business only, and have no thought of anything else, I'll answer for it."

"You are quite right, my dear sir; I am wholly of your mind. These worthy people, as you say, are thinking of absolutely nothing but their business; but that business is to distribute to the best advantage the leaden balls and the sabre-blades they keep hidden away out of sight, which they intend to bestow upon us as soon as possible."

"Do you really think so?"

"I don't think so, I am sure of it. If the religious element were not, fortunately for us, absent from this new uprising, a fact which makes me think it may not be general, I should confidently assure you that there is not one of those fellows you see over there in serge jackets and linen breeches and wooden shoes but has his post and rank and number in battalions raised by Messieurs the nobles."

"What! those tramps and beggars too?"

"Yes, those tramps and beggars especially. What characterizes this warfare, my good sir, is the fact that we have to do with an enemy who is everywhere and nowhere. You know he is there; you seek for him, and you find only a peasant like those about us, who bows to you, a beggar who holds out his hand, a pedler who offers his merchandise, a musician who rasps your ears with his hurdy-gurdy, a quack who vaunts his medicine, a little shepherd who smiles at you, a woman suckling her child on the threshold of her cottage, a harmless furze-bush growing beside the road. You pass them all without the slightest feeling of distrust, and yet, peasant, shepherd, beggar, musician, pedler, quack, and woman are the enemy. Even the furze-bush is in league with them. Some, creeping through the gorse, will follow you like your shadow, – indefatigable spies that they are! – and at the first alarming man[oe]uvre on your part, those you are tracking are warned long before you are able to surprise them. Others will have picked up from the hedges and ditches and furrows their rusty guns concealed among the reeds or the long grass, and if you are worth the trouble, they will follow you, as the others did, from bush to bush and cover to cover, till they find some favorable opportunity for a sure aim. They are saving with their powder. The furze-bush will send you a shot, and if by chance it misses you, and you are able to examine the covert, you'll find nothing there but a tangle of branches, thorns, and leaves. That's what it is to be inoffensive in these regions, my good sir."

"Are not you exaggerating, general?" said the civil officer, with a doubting air.

"Heavens and earth, Monsieur le sous-préfet! perhaps you'll come to know it by experience. Here we are in the midst of an apparently pacific crowd. We have, you say, nothing but friends about us, Frenchmen, compatriots; well, just arrest one of those fellows–"

"What would happen if I arrested him?"

"It would happen that some one of the rest, – perhaps that young *gars* in a white smock, perhaps this beggar who is eating with such an appetite on the sill of that doorway, who may be, for all we know, Diot Jambe-d'Argent, or Bras-de-fer, or any other leader of the band, – will rise and make a sign. At that sign a dozen or more sticks, now peacefully carried about, will be down on our heads, and before my escort could get to our assistance we should be as flat as wheat beneath the sickle. You are not convinced? Then suppose you make the attempt."

"No, no; I believe you, general," cried the sub-prefect, eagerly. "The devil! all this is no joke. Ever since you have been enlightening me I fancy I see the scowls on their faces; they look like scoundrels."

"Not a bit of it! They are worthy people, very worthy fellows; only, you must know how to take them; and, unluckily, that is not always the case with those who are sent to manage them," said the general, with a sarcastic smile. "Do you want a specimen of their conversation? You are, or you have been, or you ought to have been a lawyer; but I'll bet you never met in all your experience of the profession fellows as clever at talking without saying anything as these Vendéan peasants. Hey, *gars*!" continued the general, addressing a peasant between thirty-five and forty years old, who was hovering about them, and examining, apparently with curiosity, a biscuit which he held in his hand, – "Hey, *gars*, show me where those good biscuits are sold; they look to me very tempting."

"They are not sold, monsieur; they are given away."

"Bless me! Well, I want one."

"It is curious," said the peasant, "very curious that good white wheat biscuits should be given away, when they might so easily be sold."

"Yes, very singular; but what is still more singular is that the first individual I happen to address not only answers my question, but anticipates those I might ask him. Show me that biscuit, my good man."

The general examined the article which the peasant handed to him. It was a plain biscuit made of flour and milk, on which, before it was baked, a cross and four parallel bars had been marked with a knife.

"The devil! Well! a present that is amusing as well as useful is good to get. There must be a riddle of some kind in those marks. Who gave you that biscuit, my good friend?"

"No one; they don't trust me."

"Ah! then you are a patriot?"

"I am mayor of my district, and I hold by the government. I saw a woman giving a lot of these biscuit to men from Machecoul, without their asking for them and without their giving her anything in return. So then I offered to buy one, and she dared not refuse. I bought two. I ate one before her, and the other, this one, I slipped into my pocket."

"Will you let me have it? I am making a collection of rebuses, and this one seems interesting."

"I will give it or sell it, as you please."

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Dermoncourt, looking at the man with more attention than he had paid to him hitherto, "I think I understand you. You can explain these hieroglyphics?"

"Perhaps; at any rate, I can give you other information that is not to be despised."

"And you wish to be paid for it?"

"Of course I do," replied the peasant, boldly.

"That is how you serve the government which made you mayor?"

"The devil! Has the government put a tiled roof on my house? No! Has it changed the mud walls to stone? No! My house is thatched with straw and built of wood and mud. The Chouans could set fire to it in a minute, and it would burn to ashes. Whoso risks much ought to earn much; for, as you see, I might lose my all in a single night."

"You are right. Come, Monsieur le sous-préfet, this belongs to your department. Thank God, I'm only a soldier, and my supplies are paid for before delivery. Pay this man and hand his information over to me."

"And do it quickly," said the farmer, "for we are watched on all sides."

The peasants had, in fact, drawn nearer and nearer to the little group. Without, apparently, any other motive than the curiosity which all strangers in a country place naturally excite, they had formed a tolerably compact circle round the three speakers. The general took notice of it.

"My dear fellow," he said aloud, addressing the sub-prefect, "I wouldn't rely on that man's word, if I were you. He offers to sell you two hundred sacks of oats at nineteen francs the sack, but it remains to be seen when he will deliver them. Give him a small sum down and make him sign a promise of delivery."

"But I have neither paper nor pencil," said the sub-prefect, understanding the general's meaning.

"Go to the hotel, hang it! Come," said the general, looking about him, "are there any others here who have oats to sell? We have horses to feed."

One peasant answered in the affirmative, and while the general was discussing the price with him the sub-prefect and the man with the biscuit slipped away, almost unnoticed. The man, as our readers are of course aware, was no other than Courtin. Let us now try to explain the man[oe]uvres which Courtin had executed since morning. After his interview with Michel, Courtin had reflected long. It seemed to him that a plain and simple denunciation of the visitors at the château de Sunday was not the course most profitable to his interests. It might very well be that the government would leave its subordinate agents without reward, in which case the act was dangerous and without profit; for, of course, Courtin would draw down upon him the enmity of the royalists, who were the majority of the canton. It was then that he thought of the little scheme we heard him propound to Jean Oullier. He hoped by assisting the loves of the young baron to draw a pretty penny to himself, to win the good will of the marquis, whose ambition must be, as he thought, to obtain such a marriage for his daughter, and, finally, to sell at a great price his silence as to the presence of a personage whose safety, if he were not mistaken, was of the utmost consequence to the royalist party.

We have seen how Jean Oullier received his advances. It was then that Courtin, considering himself to have failed in what he regarded as an excellent scheme, decided on contenting himself with a lesser, and made the move we have now related toward the government.

XX. THE OUTBREAK

Half an hour after the conference of the sub-prefect and Courtin a *gendarme* was making his way among the groups, looking for the general, whom he found talking very amicably with a respectable old beggar in rags. The *gendarme* said a word in the general's ear, and the latter at once made his way to the little inn of the Cheval Blanc. The sub-prefect stood in the doorway.

"Well?" asked the general, noticing the highly satisfied look on the face of the public functionary.

"Ah, general! great news and good news!" replied the sub-prefect.

"Let's hear it."

"The man I've had to deal with is really very clever."

"Fine news, indeed! they are all very clever. The greatest fool among them could give points to Monsieur de Talleyrand. What has he told you, this clever man?"

"He saw the Comte de Bonneville, disguised as a peasant, enter the château de Souday last night, and with the count was another little peasant, whom he thinks was a woman-"

"What next?"

"Next! why there's no doubt, general."

"Go on, monsieur; I am all impatience," said the general, in the calmest tone.

"I mean to say that in my opinion the woman is no other than the one we have been told to look out for, – namely, the princess."

"There may be no doubt for you; there are a dozen doubts for me."

"Why so, general?"

"Because I, too, have had some confidences."

"Voluntary or involuntary?"

"Who knows, with these people?"

"Pooh! But what did they tell you?"

"They told me nothing."

"Well, what then?"

"Then, after you left me I went on bargaining for oats."

"Yes. What next?"

"Next, the peasant who spoke to me asked for earnest-money; that was fair. I asked him for a receipt; that was fair, too. He wanted to go to a shop and write it. 'No,' I said. 'Here's a pencil; haven't you a scrap of paper about you? My hat will do for a table.' He tore off the back of a letter and gave me a receipt. There it is. Read it."

The sub-prefect took the paper, and read; -

"Received, of M. Jean-Louis Robier, the sum of fifty francs, on account, for thirty sacks of flour, which I engage to deliver to him May 28.

F. Terrien.

May 14, 1832."

"Well," said the sub-prefect, "I don't see any information there."

"Turn over the paper."

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed the functionary.

The paper which he held was one half of a page of letter paper torn through the middle. On the other side from that on which the receipt was written were these words: -

arquis
ceived this instant the news

her whom we are expecting.
Beaufays, evening of 26th
send officers of your division
presented to Madame.
your people in hand.
respectfully,
oux.

"The devil!" cried the sub-prefect; "that is nothing more nor less than a call to arms. It is easy enough to make out the rest."

"Nothing easier," said the general. Then he added, in a low voice, "Too easy, perhaps."

"Ah, *ça*! didn't you tell me these people were sly and cautious? I call this, on the contrary, a bit of innocent carelessness which is amazing."

"Wait," said Dermoncourt; "that's not all."

"Ah, ha!"

"After parting with my seller of oats I met a beggar, half an idiot. I talked to him about the good God and the saints and the Virgin, about the buckwheat and the apple year (you observe that the apple-trees are in bloom), and I ended by asking him if he could not act as guide for us to Loroux, where, as you know, I am to make an inspection. 'I can't,' said my idiot, with a mischievous look. 'Why not?' I asked in the stupidest way I could. 'Because I am ordered to guide a lady and two gentlemen from Puy-Laurens to La Flocelière.'"

"The devil! here's a complication."

"On the contrary, enlightenment."

"Explain."

"Confidences which are given when not extorted, in a region where it is so difficult to get them, seem to me such clumsy traps that an old fox like myself ought to be ashamed to be caught by them. The Duchesse de Berry, if she is really in La Vendée, cannot be at Souday and Beaufays and Puy-Laurens at the same time. What do you think, my dear sub-prefect?"

"Confound it all!" replied the public functionary, scratching his head, "I think she may have been, or still may be, in all those places, one after another; but if I were you, instead of chasing her round from place to place, where she may or may not have been, I should go straight to La Flocelière, where your idiot is to take her to-day."

"Then you would make a very poor bloodhound, my dear fellow. The only reliable information we have so far received is that given by the scamp who had the biscuit, and whom you examined here—"

"But the others?"

"I'll bet my general's epaulets against those of a sub-lieutenant that the others were put in my way by some shrewd fellows who saw and suspected our talk with the man about his biscuit. Let us begin the hunt, my dear sub-prefect, and confine our attention to Souday, if we don't want to make an utter failure of it."

"Bravo!" cried the sub-prefect. "I feared I had committed a blunder; but what you say reassures me."

"What have you done?"

"Well, I have got the name of this mayor. He is called Courtin, and is mayor of the village of la Logerie."

"I know that. It is close by the spot where we came near capturing Charette thirty-seven years ago."

"Well, this man has pointed out to me an individual who could serve us as guide, and whom it would be well to arrest so that he may not go back to the château and give the alarm."

"Who is the man?"

"The marquis's steward. Here is a description of him."

The general took the paper and read: -

"Short gray hair, low forehead, keen black eyes, bushy eyebrows, wart on his nose, hair in the nostrils, whiskers round the face, round hat, velveteen jacket, waistcoat and breeches the same, leathern belt and gaiters. Special points: a brown, retriever, and the second incisor on the left side broken."

"Good!" said the general; "that's my oat-seller to a tee. Terrien! His name is no more Terrien than mine's Barabbas."

"Well, general, you can soon make sure of that."

"How so?"

"He'll be here in a minute."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Is he coming here?"

"He is coming here."

"Of his own will?"

"His own will, or by force."

"Force?"

"Yes; I have just given the order to arrest him. It is done by this time."

"Ten thousand thunders!" cried the general, letting his fist fall upon the table with such a thud that the public functionary bounded in his chair. "Ten thousand thunders!" he cried again; "what have you done?"

"He seems to me, general, a dangerous man from all I hear of him, and there was but one thing to do, – namely, arrest him."

"Dangerous! dangerous! He is much more dangerous now than he was ten minutes ago."

"But if he is in custody he can't do harm."

"No matter how quick your men are they won't prevent his giving warning. The princess will be warned before we have gone a couple of miles. It will be lucky for us if you haven't roused the whole population so that I cannot take a single man from the garrison."

"Perhaps there's yet time," said the sub-prefect, rushing to the door.

"Yes, make haste. Ah! thunder! it's too late!"

A dull roar was heard without, deepening every second until it reached the volume of that dreadful concert of sounds made by a multitude as the prelude to a battle.

The general opened the window. He saw, at a short distance from the inn, Jean Oullier, bound and in the grasp of *gendarmes* who were bringing him along. The crowd surrounded them, howling and threatening. The *gendarmes* came on slowly and with difficulty. They had not as yet made use of their arms. There was not a moment to lose.

"Well, the wine is drawn; we have got to drink it," said the general, pulling off his civilian clothes, and hastily getting into his regimentals. Then he called to his secretary.

"Rusconi, my horse! my horse!" he shouted. "As for you, Monsieur le sous-préfet, call out your militia, if you have any; but not a gun is to be fired without my orders."

A captain, sent by the secretary, entered the room.

"Captain," said the general, "bring your men into the courtyard. Order my chasseurs to mount; two days' rations, and twenty-five cartridges to each man; and hold yourself ready to follow me at the first signal I give you."

The old general, recovering all the fire of his youth, went down into the courtyard, where, sending the civilians to the right-about, he ordered the gates into the street to be opened.

"What!" cried the sub-prefect, "you are surely not going to present yourself to that furious crowd all alone?"

"That's precisely what I am going to do. Damn it! your men must be supported. This is no time for sentiment. Open that gate."

The two sides of the gate were no sooner opened than the general, setting spurs to his horse, was instantly in the middle of the street and the thick of the *mêlée*. This sudden apparition of an old soldier, with a determined face and martial bearing, in full uniform, and glittering with decorations, together with the bold promptitude of his action, produced an electric effect upon the crowd. The clamoring ceased as if by magic. Cudgels were lowered; the peasants who were nearest to the general actually touched their hats; the crowd made way, and the soldier of Rivoli and the Pyramids rode on some twenty paces in the direction of the *gendarmes*.

"Why, what's the matter with you, my *gars*?" he cried, in so stentorian a voice that he was heard even to the neighboring streets.

"They've arrested Jean Oullier; that's what's the matter with us," replied a voice.

"And Jean Oullier is a good man," shouted another.

"They ought to arrest bad men, and not good ones," said a third.

"And that's why we are not going to let them take Jean Oullier," cried a fourth.

"Silence!" said the general, in so imperious a tone that every voice was hushed. "If Jean Oullier is a good man, a worthy man, – which I do not doubt, – Jean Oullier will be released. If he is one who is trying to deceive you and take advantage of your good and loyal feelings, Jean Oullier will be punished. Do you think it unjust to punish those who try to plunge the country back into those horrors of civil war of which the old now tell the young with tears?"

"Jean Oullier is a peaceable man, and doesn't do harm to any one," said a voice.

"What are you wanting now?" continued the general, without noticing the interruption. "Your priests are respected; your religion is ours. Have we killed the king, as in 1793? Have we abolished God, as in 1794? Is your property in danger? No; you and your property are safe under the common law. Never were your trades and your commerce so flourishing."

"That is true," said a young peasant.

"Don't listen to bad Frenchmen who, to satisfy their selfish passions, do not shrink from calling down upon their country all the horrors of civil war. Can't you remember what those horrors were? Must I remind you of them? Must I bring to mind your old men, your mothers, your wives, your children massacred before your eyes, your harvests trampled under foot, your cottages in flames, death and ruin at every hearth!"

"It was the Blues who did it all," cried a voice.

"No, it was not the Blues," continued the general. "It was those who drove you to that senseless struggle, senseless then, but wicked now, – a struggle which had at least a pretext then, but has none whatever in these days."

While speaking the general pushed his horse in the direction of the *gendarmes*, who, on their side, made every effort to reach the general. This was all the more possible because his address, soldierly as it was, made an evident impression on some of the peasants. Many lowered their heads and were silent; others made remarks to their neighbors, which seemed from their manner to imply approval.

Nevertheless, the farther the general advanced into the crowd, the less favorable grew the expression of the faces. In fact, the nearest to him were altogether menacing; and the owners of these faces were evidently the promoters and the leaders of the uproar, – probably the chiefs of the various bands and what were called the captains of parishes.

For such men as these it was useless to be eloquent; their determination was fixed not to listen and not to let others listen. They did not shout nor cry; they roared and howled. The general understood the situation. He resolved to impress the minds of these men by one of those acts of personal vigor which have such enormous influence on the multitude.

Aubin Courte-Joie was in the front rank of the rioters. This may seem strange in view of his crippled condition. But Aubin Courte-Joie had, for the time being, added to his useless wooden legs two good and powerful legs of flesh and blood. In other words, he was mounted on the shoulders of a colossal tramp; and the said tramp, by means of straps attached to the wooden legs of his rider, was able to hold the cripple as firmly in his seat as the general was in his saddle.

Thus perched, Aubin Courte-Joie's head was on the level of the general's epaulet, where he kept up a series of frantic vociferations and threatening gestures. The general stretched out his hand, took the tavern-keeper by the collar of his jacket, and then, by sheer force of wrist, raised him, held him a moment suspended above the crowd, and then handed him over to a *gendarme*, saying: -

"Lock up that mountebank; he is enough to give one a headache."

The tramp, relieved of his rider, raised his head, and the general recognized the idiot he had talked with an hour earlier; only, by this time the idiot looked as shrewd and clever as any of them.

The general's action had raised a laugh from the crowd, but this hilarity did not last long. Aubin Courte-Joie happened to be held by the *gendarme* who was placed to the left of Jean Oullier. He gently drew from his pocket an open knife, and plunged it to the hilt in the breast of the *gendarme*, crying out: -

"Vive Henri V.! Fly, *gars* Oullier!"

At the same instant the tramp, inspired perhaps by a legitimate sentiment of emulation, and wishing to make a worthy rejoinder to the athletic action of the general, glided under his horse, caught the general by the boot, and with a sudden and vigorous movement, pitched him over on the other side.

The general and the *gendarme* fell at the same instant, and they might have been thought dead; but the general was up immediately and into his saddle with as much strength as adroitness. As he sprang to his seat he gave such a powerful blow with his fist on the bare head of the late idiot that the latter, without uttering a cry, fell to the ground as if his skull were broken. Neither tramp nor *gendarme* rose again. The tramp had fainted; the *gendarme* was dead.

Jean Oullier, on his part, though his hands were bound, gave such a vigorous blow with his shoulder to the *gendarme* on his right that the latter staggered. Jean Oullier jumped over the dead body of the *gendarme* on the left, and darted into the crowd.

But the general's eye was everywhere, even behind him.

Instantly he turned his horse. The animal bounded into the centre of the living whirlpool, and the old soldier caught Jean Oullier as he had caught Aubin Courte-Joie, and threw him across the pommel of his own saddle. Then the stones began to rain, and the cudgels rose. The *gendarmes* held firm, presenting their bayonets to the crowd, which dared not attack them at close quarters and was forced to content itself by flinging projectiles.

They advanced in this way to about sixty feet from the inn. Here the position of the general and his men became critical. The peasants, who seemed determined that Jean Oullier should not be left in the enemy's power, grew more and more aggressive. Already the bayonets were stained with blood, and the fury of the rioters was evidently increasing. Fortunately the general was now near enough to the courtyard of the inn for his voice to reach it.

"Here! grenadiers of the 32d!" he shouted.

At the same instant the gates opened, and the soldiers poured forth with fixed bayonets and drove back the crowd. The general and the *gendarmes* entered the yard. Here the general encountered the sub-prefect, who was awaiting him.

"There's your man," he said, flinging Jean Oullier to him, as if the Chouan were a bale of goods; "and trouble enough he has cost us! God grant he is worth his price."

Just then a brisk firing was heard from the farther end of the market-place.

"What's that?" cried the general, listening with all his ears, and his nostrils open.

"The National Guard, no doubt," replied the sub-prefect. "I ordered them out, and they must have met the rioters."

"Who ordered them to fire?"

"I did, general. I was bound to go to your rescue."

"Ten thousand thunders! Can't you see that I rescued myself?" said the old soldier. Then, shaking his head, he added, "Monsieur, remember this: to shed blood in civil war is worse than a crime; it is a blunder."

An officer galloped into the courtyard.

"General," he said, "the rioters are flying in all directions. The chasseurs are here. Shall we pursue them?"

"Not a man is to stir," said the general. "Leave the National Guard to manage the affair. They are friends; they'll settle it."

A second discharge of musketry proved that the militia and the peasantry were indeed settling it. This was the firing heard at La Logerie by Baron Michel.

"Ah!" said the general, "now we must see what profit we can get out of this melancholy business." Pointing to Jean Oullier, he added, "We have but one chance, and that is that no one but this man is in the secret. Did he have any communication with any one after you arrested him, *gendarmes*?"

"No, general, not even by signs, for his hands were bound."

"Didn't he make any gestures with his head, or say a word to anybody? You know very well that a nod or a single word is enough with these fellows."

"No, general, not one."

"Well then, we may as well run the chance. Let your men eat their rations, captain; in half an hour we start. The *gendarmes* and the National Guard are enough to guard the town. I shall take my escort of chasseurs to clear the way."

So saying, the general retired into the inn. The soldiers made their preparations for departure.

During this time Jean Oullier sat stolidly on a stone in the middle of the courtyard, kept in sight by the two *gendarmes* who were guarding him. His face retained its habitual impassibility. With his two bound hands he stroked his dog, which had followed him, and was now resting its head on his knees and licking his hand, as if to remind the prisoner in his misfortune that a friend was near him.

Jean Oullier was gently stroking the faithful creature's head with the feather of a wild duck he might have picked up in the courtyard. Suddenly, profiting by a moment when his two guards were speaking to each other and not observing him, he slipped the feather between the teeth of the animal, made it a sign of intelligence, and rose, saying, in a low voice: -

"Go, Pataud!"

The dog gently moved away, looking back at his master from time to time. Then, when he reached the gate, he bounded out, unobserved by any one, and disappeared.

"Good!" said Jean Oullier to himself. "He'll get there before we do."

Unfortunately, the *gendarmes* were not the only ones who were watching the prisoner.

XXI. JEAN OULLIER'S RESOURCES

Even in these days there are few good roads in La Vendée, and those few have been made since 1832, that is, since the period of which we are now writing. This lack of roads was the principal strength of the insurgents in the great war. Let us say a word on those that then existed, concerning ourselves only with those on the left bank of the Loire.

They were two in number. The first went from Nantes to Rochelle, through Montaigu; the second from Nantes to Paimb[oe]uf by the Pélerin, following almost continuously the banks of the river.

Besides these two main highways, there were other secondary or cross roads; these went from Nantes to Beaupréau through Vallet, from Nantes to Mortagne, Chollet, and Bressuire by Clisson, from Nantes to Sables-d'Olonne by Légé, and from Nantes to Challans by Machecoul. To reach Machecoul by either of these roads it was necessary to make a long detour, in fact, as far round as Légé; thence along the road from Nantes to Sables-d'Olonne, following that until it was crossed by the road to Challans, by which the traveller retraced his way to Machecoul.

The general knew too well that the whole success of his expedition depended on the rapidity with which it was conducted to be willing to resign himself to so long a march. Besides, none of these roads were favorable for military operations. They were bordered by deep ditches, gorse, bushes of all kinds, and trees; in many places they were sunken between high banks with hedges at the top. Such roads, under any of these conditions, were favorable for ambushes; the little advantage they offered in no way counterbalanced their risks. The general therefore determined to follow a cross-country road which led to Machecoul by Vieille-Vigne and shortened the way by over four miles.

The system of encampments the general had adopted since coming to La Vendée had familiarized his soldiers with the nature of the land and given them a good eye for dangerous places. The captain in command of the infantry knew the way as far as the Boulogne river; but from that point it was necessary to have a guide. It was plain that Jean Oullier would not be willing to show the way, and another man was therefore obtained on whose fidelity they could rely.

The general in deciding on the cross-road took every precaution against a surprise. Two chasseurs, pistol in hand, went first to reconnoitre the way for the column; while a dozen men on each side of the road examined the gorse and the bushes which lined it everywhere and sometimes overtopped it. The general marched at the head of his little troop, in the midst of which he had placed Jean Oullier.

The old Vendéan, with his wrists bound, was mounted behind a chasseur; for greater security a girth had been passed around his body and buckled across the breast of the soldier before him; so that Jean Oullier if he could even have freed his hands could not escape his bonds to the rider before him. Two other chasseurs rode to the left and right with special orders to watch him carefully.

It was about six in the evening when the detachment left Montaigu; they had fifteen miles to do, and, supposing that those fifteen miles took five hours, they ought to be at the château de Souday by eleven. The hour seemed favorable to the general for his plans. If Courtin's report was correct, if he had not been misled in his conclusions, the leaders of the last Vendéan movement were now assembled at Souday to confer with the princess, and it was likely that they would not have left the château before his arrival. If this were so, nothing could prevent him from capturing them all by one throw of the net.

After marching for half an hour, that is, to a distance of about a mile and a half from Montaigu, just as the little column was passing the crossway of Saint-Corentin they came upon an old woman in rags, who was praying on her knees before a wayside crucifix. At the noise the column made she turned her head, and then, as if impelled by curiosity, she rose and stood beside the road to see it

pass. The gold-laced coat of the general seemed to give her the idea of begging, and she muttered the sort of prayer with which beggars ask for alms.

Officers and soldiers, preoccupied with other matters, and growing surly as the twilight deepened, passed on without attending to her.

"Your general took no notice of that poor woman who asked for bread," said Jean Oullier to the chasseur who was on his right.

"Why do you think so?" said the soldier.

"Because he did not give her anything. Let him beware. Whoso repulses the open palm must fear the closed fist, says the proverb. Harm will happen to us."

"If you take that prediction to yourself, my good man, you are not mistaken, inasmuch as you are already in peril."

"Yes, and that is why I would like to conjure it away."

"How can you?"

"Feel in my pocket for me and take out a piece of money."

"What for?"

"To give to that old woman, and then she'll share her prayers between me who give the alms and you who enable her to get them."

The chasseur shrugged his shoulders; but superstitions are singularly contagious, and those attached to ideas of charity are more so than others. The soldier, while pretending to be above such nonsense, thought he ought not to refuse to do the kindness Jean Oullier asked of him, which might, moreover, bring down the blessing of Heaven on both of them.

The troop was at this moment wheeling to the right into the sunken road which leads to Vieille-Vigne. The general stopped his horse to watch the men file past him, and see with his own eyes that all the arrangements he had ordered were carried out; it thus happened that he saw Jean Oullier speaking to the chasseur, and he also saw the soldier's action.

"What do you mean by letting the prisoner speak to strangers on the road?" he said sharply.

The chasseur related what had happened.

"Halt!" cried the general; "arrest that woman, and search her."

The order was instantly obeyed, but nothing was found on the old beggar-woman but a few pieces of copper money, which the general examined with the utmost care. In vain did he turn and re-turn the coins; nothing could he find in the least suspicious about them. He put the coins in his pocket, however, giving to the old woman a five-franc piece in exchange. Jean Oullier watched the general's actions with a sarcastic smile.

"Well, you see," he said in a low voice but loud enough for the beggar-woman to hear him without losing a single word, "you see the poor alms of a *prisoner*" (he emphasized the word) "have brought you luck, old mother; and that's another reason still why you should remember me in your prayers. A dozen *Ave Marias* said for him will greatly help the salvation of a poor devil."

Jean Oullier raised his voice as he said the last words.

"My good man," said the general to Jean Oullier when the column had resumed its march, "in future you must address yourself to me when you have any charity to do; I'll recommend you to the prayers of those you want to succor; my mediation won't do you any harm up above, and it may spare you many an annoyance here below. As for you, men," continued the general, speaking gruffly to his cavalry, "don't forget my orders in future; for the harm will fall upon yourselves, and I tell you so!"

At Vieille-Vigne they halted fifteen minutes to rest the infantry. The Chouan was placed in the centre of the square, so as to isolate him completely from the population which flocked inquisitively about the troop. The horse on which Jean Oullier was mounted had cast a shoe, and was, moreover, tired with its double burden. The general picked out the strongest animal in the squadron to take its place. This horse belonged to one of the troopers in the front rank, who, in spite of the greater exposure to danger where he was, seemed very reluctant to change places with his comrade.

The man was short, stocky, vigorous, with a gentle but intelligent face; and was quite devoid of the cavalier manner which characterized his comrades. During the preparations for this change, which was made by the light of a lantern (by that time the night was very dark) Jean Oullier caught sight of the face of the man behind whom he was to continue his way; his eyes met those of the soldier, and he noticed that the latter lowered his.

Again the column started, taking every precaution; for the farther they advanced, the thicker grew the bushes and the coverts beside the road; consequently the easier it became to attack them. The prospect of danger to be met and weariness to be endured, on roads which were little better in many places than beds of water-courses strewn with rocks and stones, did not lessen the gayety of the soldiers, who now began, after recovering from their first surliness at nightfall, to find amusement in the idea of danger, and to talk among themselves with that liveliness which seldom deserts a French soldier for any length of time. The chasseur behind whom Jean Oullier was mounted alone took no part in the talk, but was thoughtful and gloomy.

"Confound you, Thomas," said the trooper on the right, addressing him, "you never have much to say for yourself, but to-day, I will declare, one would think you were burying the devil."

"At any rate," said the one to the left, "he has got him on his back. You ought to like that, Thomas, for you are half a Chouan yourself."

"He's a whole Chouan, I'm thinking; doesn't he go to mass every Sunday?"

The chasseur named Thomas had no time to answer these twittings, for the general's voice now ordered the men to break ranks and advance single file, the way having become so narrow and the bank on each side so steep that it was impossible for two horsemen to ride abreast.

During the momentary confusion caused by this man[oe]uvre Jean Oullier began to whistle in a low key the Breton air "The Chouans are men of heart."

At the first note the rider quivered. Then, as the other troopers were now before and behind them, Jean Oullier, safe from observation, put his mouth close to the ear of the one behind whom he was mounted.

"Ha! you may be as silent as you like, Thomas Tinguy," he whispered; "I knew you at once, and you knew me."

The soldier sighed and made a motion with his shoulders which seem to mean that he was acting against his will. But he made no answer.

"Thomas Tinguy," said Jean Oullier, "do you know where you are going? Do you know where you are taking your father's old friend? To the pillage and destruction of the château de Souday, whose masters have been for years and years the benefactors of your family."

Thomas Tinguy sighed again.

"Your father is dead," continued Jean Oullier.

Thomas made no reply, but he shuddered in his saddle; a single word escaped his lips and reached the ears of Jean Oullier: -

"Dead!"

"Yes, dead," replied the Chouan; "and who watched beside his dying bed with your sister Rosine and received his last sigh? The two young ladies from Souday whom you know well, Mademoiselle Bertha and Mademoiselle Mary; and that at the risk of their lives, for your father died of a malignant fever. Not being able to save his life, angels that they are they stayed beside him to ease his death. Where is your sister now, having no home? At the château de Souday. Ah! Thomas Tinguy, I'd rather be poor Jean Oullier, whom they'll shoot against a wall, than he who takes him bound to execution."

"Hush! Jean, hush!" said Thomas Tinguy, with a sob in his voice; "we are not there yet-wait and see."

While this little colloquy was passing between Jean Oullier and the son of the older Tinguy, the ravine through which the little column was moving began to slope downward rapidly. They were nearing one of the fords of the Boulogne river.

It was a dark night without a star in the sky; and such a night, while it might favor the ultimate success of the expedition, might also, on the other hand, hinder its march and even imperil it in this wild and unknown country.

When they reached the ford they found the two chasseurs who had been sent in advance, awaiting them, pistol in hand. They were evidently uneasy. The ford, instead of being a clear, shallow stream rippling over pebbles, was a dark and stagnant body of water, washing softly against a rocky bank.

They looked on all sides for the guide whom Courtin had agreed should meet them at this point. The general gave a loud call. A voice answered on the opposite shore, -

"Qui vive?"

"Souday!" replied the general.

"Then you are the ones I am waiting for," said the guide.

"Is this the ford of the Boulogne?" asked the general.

"Yes."

"Why is the water so high?"

"There's a flood since the last rains."

"Is the crossing possible in spite of it?"

"Damn it! I don't know. I have never seen the river as high as this. I think it would be more prudent-"

The guide's voice suddenly stopped, or rather seemed to turn into a moan. Then the sound of a struggle was plainly heard, as if the feet of several men were tussling on the pebbles.

"A thousand thunders!" cried the general, "our guide is being murdered!"

A cry of agony replied to the general's exclamation and confirmed it.

"A grenadier up behind every trooper!" cried the general. "The captain behind me! The two lieutenants stay here with the rest of the troop, the prisoner, and his three guards. Come on, and quickly too!"

In a moment the seventeen chasseurs had each a grenadier behind him. Eighty grenadiers, the two lieutenants, the prisoner and his three guards, including Tinguy, remained on the right bank of the river. The order was executed with the rapidity of thought, and the general, followed by his chasseurs and the seventeen grenadiers behind them, plunged into the bed of the river.

Twenty feet from the shore the horses lost foothold, but they swam for a few moments and reached, without accident, the opposite bank. They had hardly landed when the grenadiers dismounted.

"Can you see anything?" said the general, trying himself to pierce the darkness that surrounded the little troop.

"No, general," said the men with one voice.

"Yet it was certainly from here," said the general, as if speaking to himself, "that the man answered me. Look behind the bushes, but without scattering; you may find his body."

The soldiers obeyed, searching round a radius of some hundred and fifty feet. But they returned in about fifteen minutes and reported that they could see nothing, and had found no traces of the body.

"You saw absolutely nothing?" asked the general.

One grenadier alone came forward, holding in his hand a cotton cap.

"I found this," he said.

"Where?"

"Hooked to a bush."

"That's our guide's cap," said the general.

"How do you know?" asked the captain.

"Because the men who attacked him would have worn hats," replied the general, without the slightest hesitation.

The captain was silent, not daring to ask further; but it was evident that the general's explanation had explained nothing to his mind.

Dermoncourt understood the captain's silence.

"It is very simple," he said; "the men who have just murdered our guide have followed us ever since we left Montaigu for the purpose of rescuing the prisoner. The arrest must be a more important matter than I thought it was. These men who have followed us were at the fair, and wore hats, as they always do when they go to the towns; whereas our guide was called from his bed suddenly by the man who sent him to us, and he would of course put on the cap he was in the habit of wearing; it may even have been on his head as he slept."

"Do you really think, general," said the captain, "that those Chouans would dare to come so near our line of march?"

"They have come step by step with us from Montaigu; they have not let us out of their sight one single instant. Heavens and earth! people complain of our inhumanity in this war, and yet at every step we are made to feel, to our cost, that we have not been inhuman enough. Fool and simpleton that I have been!"

"I understand you less and less, general," said the captain, laughing.

"Do you remember that beggar-woman who spoke to us just after we left Montaigu?"

"Yes, general."

"Well, it was that old hag who put up this attack. I wanted to send her back into the town; I did wrong not to follow my own instinct; I should have saved the life of this poor devil. Ah! I see now how it was done. The *Ave Marias* for which the prisoner asked have been answered here."

"Do you think they will dare to attack us?"

"If they were in force it would have been done before now. But there are only six or eight of them at the most."

"Shall I bring over the men on the other bank, general?"

"No, wait; the horses lost foothold and the infantry would drown. There must be some better ford near by."

"You think so, general?"

"Damn it! I'm sure."

"Then you know the river?"

"Never saw it before."

"Then why-?"

"Ah! captain, it is easy to see that you didn't go through the great war, as I did, – that war of savages, in which we had to go by induction. These Vendéan fellows were not posted here on this side of the river in ambuscade at the moment when we came up on the other: that is clear."

"For you, general."

"Hey! bless my soul, – clear to anybody! If they had been posted there, they would have heard the guide and killed him or captured him before we came; consequently the band were on our flank as we came along."

"That is probably so, general."

"And they must have reached the bank of the river just before us. Now the interval between the time we arrived and halted and the moment our guide was attacked was too short to allow of their making a long detour to another ford-no, they must have forded close by."

"Why couldn't they have crossed here?"

"Because a peasant, especially in these interior regions, hardly ever knows how to swim. The ford is close at hand, that is certain. Send four men up the river and four men down. Quick! We don't want to die here, especially in wet clothes."

At the end of ten minutes the officer returned.

"You are right, general," he said; "three hundred yards from here there's a small island; the trunk of a tree joins it with the other bank, and another trunk with this side."

"Good!" said the general; "then they can get across without wetting a cartridge."

Calling to the officer on the opposite bank, -

"Ohé! lieutenant," he said, "go up the river till you come to a tree, cross there, and be sure you watch the prisoner."

XXII. FETCH! PATAUD, FETCH!

For the next five minutes the two troops advanced slowly up the river, one on each bank. When they reached the place discovered by the captain the general called a halt.

"One lieutenant and forty men across!" he cried.

Forty men and one lieutenant came over with the water up to their shoulders, though they were able to lift their guns and their cartridge-boxes above the surface. On landing, they ranged in line of battle.

"Now," said the general, "bring over the prisoner."

Thomas Tinguy entered the water with a chasseur on each side of him.

"Thomas," said Jean Oullier, in a low but penetrating voice, "If I were in your place I should be afraid of one thing; I should expect to see the ghost of my father rising before me and asking why I shed the blood of his best friend rather than just unbuckle a miserable girth."

The chasseur passed his hand over his forehead, which was bathed in sweat, and made the sign of the cross. At this moment the three riders were in the middle of the river, but the current had slightly separated them.

Suddenly, a loud sound accompanied by the splashing of water proved that Jean Oullier had not in vain evoked before the poor superstitious Breton soldier the revered image of his father.

The general knew at once what the sound meant.

"The prisoner is escaping!" he cried in a voice of thunder. "Light torches, spread yourselves along the bank, fire upon him if he shows himself. As for you," he added addressing Thomas Tinguy, who came ashore close to him without attempting to escape, – "as for you, you go no farther."

Taking a pistol from his belt he fired.

"Thus die all traitors!" he cried.

And Thomas Tinguy, shot through the breast, fell dead.

The soldiers, obeying orders with a rapidity which showed they felt the gravity of their situation, rushed along the river in the direction of the current. A dozen torches lighted on each bank threw their ruddy glare upon the water.

Jean Oullier, released from his chief bond when Thomas Tinguy unbuckled the girth, slid from the horse and plunged into the river, passing between the legs of the horse on the right. We may now inquire how it is possible for a man to swim with his hands bound in front of him.

Jean Oullier had relied so confidently on his appeal to the son of his old friend that as soon as the darkness fell he began to gnaw the rope that bound his wrists with his teeth. He had good teeth, so that by the time they reached the river the rope held only by a single strand; once in the water a vigorous jerk parted it altogether.

At the end of a few seconds the Chouan was forced to come to the surface and breathe; instantly a dozen shots were fired at him, and as many balls set the water foaming about him. By a miracle none touched him; but he felt the wind of their passage across his face.

It was not prudent to tempt such luck a second time, for then it would be tempting God, not luck. He plunged again, and finding foothold turned to go up the river instead of keeping down with the current; in short, he made what is called in the hunting-field a double; it often succeeds with a hare, why not with a man? thought he.

Jean Oullier therefore doubled, went up the river under water, holding his breath till his chest came near to bursting, and not reappearing on the surface till he was beyond the line of light thrown by the torches on the river.

This man[oe]uvre deceived his enemies. Little supposing that he would voluntarily add another danger to his flight, the soldiers continued to look for him down instead of up the river, holding

their guns like hunters watching for game, and ready to fire the instant that he showed himself. Their interest in the sport was all the greater because the game was a man.

Half a dozen grenadiers alone beat up the river, and they carried but one torch among them.

Stifling as best he could the heavy sound of his breathing, Jean Oullier managed to reach a willow the branches of which stretched over the river, their tips even touching the water. The swimmer seized a branch, put it between his teeth, and held himself thus with his head thrown back so that his mouth and nostrils were out of water and able to breathe the air.

He had hardly recovered his breath before he heard a plaintive howl from the spot where the column had halted and where he himself had dropped into the river. He knew the sound.

"Pataud!" he murmured; "Pataud here, when I sent him to Souday! Something has happened to him! Oh, my God! my God!" he cried with inexpressible fervor and deep faith, "now, *now* it is all-important to save me from being recaptured."

The soldiers had seen Jean Oullier's dog in the courtyard and they recognized him.

"There's his dog! there's his dog!" they cried.

"Bravo!" cried a sergeant; "he'll help us to catch his master."

And he tried to lay a hand on him. But although the poor animal seemed stiff and tired, he eluded the man's grasp, and sniffing the air in the direction of the current he jumped into the river.

"This way, comrades, this way!" cried the sergeant, stretching his arm in the direction taken by the dog "He's after his master."

The moment Jean Oullier heard Pataud's cry he put his head out of water, regardless of the consequences to himself. He saw the dog cutting diagonally across the river, swimming directly for him; he knew he was lost if he did not make some mighty effort. To sacrifice his dog was to Jean Oullier a supreme effort. If his own life alone had been in the balance Jean Oullier would have taken his risks and been lost or saved with Pataud; at any rate he would have hesitated before he saved himself at the cost of the dog's life.

He quickly took off the goatskin cape he wore over his jacket and let it float on the surface of the water, giving it a strong push into the middle of the current. Pataud was then not twenty feet from him.

"Seek! fetch!" he said in a low voice showing the direction to the dog, Then, as the poor animal, feeling no doubt that his strength was leaving him, hesitated to obey.

"Fetch, Pataud, fetch!" cried Jean Oullier, imperatively.

Pataud turned and swam in the direction of the goatskin, which was now about fifty feet away from him. Jean Oullier, seeing that his trick had succeeded, dived again at the moment when the soldiers on the bank were alongside the willow. One of them carrying the torch scrambled quickly up the tree and lit the whole bed of the river. The goatskin was plainly seen floating rapidly down the current, and Pataud was swimming after it, moaning and whining as if distressed that his failing strength prevented him from accomplishing his master's order.

The soldiers, following the dog's lead, redescended the river, going farther and farther away from Jean Oullier. As soon as one of them caught sight of the goatskin he shouted to his comrades: -

"Here, friends! here he is! here he is, the *brigand*!" and he fired at the goatskin.

Grenadiers and chasseurs ran pell-mell along both banks, getting farther and farther from Jean Oullier, and riddling the goatskin, after which Pataud was still swimming, with their balls. For some minutes the firing was so continuous that there was no need of torches; the flashes of burning sulphur from the muskets lit up the wild ravine through which the Boulogne flows, while the rocks, echoing back the volleys, redoubled the noise.

The general was the first to discover the blunder of his men.

"Stop the firing!" he said to the captain who was still beside him; "those fools have dropped the prey for the shadow."

Just then a brilliant light shone from the crest of the rocky ridge overhanging the river; a sharp hiss sounded above the heads of the two officers, and a ball buried itself in the trunk of a tree beyond them.

"Ah ha!" exclaimed the general, coolly; "that rascal only asked for a dozen *Ave Marias*, but his friends are inclined to be liberal!"

Three or four more shots were now fired, and the balls ricocheted along the shore. One man cried out. Then, in a voice that overpowered the tumult, the general shouted:

"Bugles, sound the recall! and you, there, put out the torches!"

Then in a low voice to the captain, -

"Bring the other forty over at once; we shall need every man here in a minute."

The soldiers, startled by this night attack, clustered round their general. Five or six flashes, at rather long distances apart, shone from the crest of the ravine, and lit up momentarily the dark dome of the sky. A grenadier fell dead; the horse of a chasseur reared and fell over on his rider with a ball through his chest.

"Forward! a thousand thunders! forward!" cried the general, "and let's see if those night-hawks will dare to wait for us."

Putting himself at the head of his men he began to climb the slope of the ravine with such vigor that, in spite of the darkness which made the ascension difficult, and in spite of the balls which met them and brought down two more of his men, the little troop soon scaled the height. The enemy's fire stopped instantly, and though a few shaking furze-bushes still showed the recent presence of Chouans, it might be thought that the earth had opened and swallowed them up.

"Sad war! sad war!" muttered the general. "And now, of course, our whole expedition is a failure. No matter! better attempt it. Besides, Souday is on the road to Machecoul, and we can't rest our men short of Machecoul."

"But we want a guide, general," said the captain.

"Guide! Don't you see that light, a thousand feet off, over there?"

"A light?"

"Damn it, yes! - a light."

"No, I don't, general."

"Well, I see it. That light means a hut; a hut means a peasant; and whether that peasant be man, woman, or child, he or she shall be made to guide us through the forest."

Then, in a tone which augured ill for the inhabitant of the hut, the general gave orders to resume the march, after carefully extending his line of scouts and guards as far as he dared expose the individual safety of his men.

The general, followed by his little column, had hardly passed out of sight beyond the ridge before a man came out of the water, stopped an instant behind a willow to listen attentively, and then glided from bush to bush along the shore, with the evident intention of following the path the troop had taken.

As he grasped a tuft of heather to begin the ascent he heard a feeble moan at a little distance. Jean Oullier-for of course it was he-turned instantly in the direction of the moans. The nearer he approached them, the more distressing they became. The man stooped down with his hands stretched out and felt them licked with a warm, soft tongue.

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