

LEVER CHARLES JAMES

MAURICE TIERNAY,
SOLDIER OF FORTUNE

Charles Lever
Maurice Tiernay,
Soldier of Fortune

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NOTICE

The strangeness of some of the incidents, and the rapidity with which events so remarkable succeeded each other, almost deterred the writer from ever committing them to the press; nor was it till after much consultation, and some persuasive influence on the part of friends, that he at length yielded and decided upon so doing. Whether in that determination his choice was a wise one, must be left to the judgment of the reader; for himself, he has but to say that to ponder over some of these early scenes, and turn over, in thought, some of his youthful passages, has solaced many a weary hour of an age when men make few new friendships, and have almost as few opportunities to cultivate old ones.

That the chief events related in these pages – such, for instance, as every detail of the French invasion, the capture of Wolfe Tone, and the attack on Monte di Faccio – are described with rigid exactness, the writer is most sincere in the expression of his conviction. For the truth of incident purely personal, it is

needless to press any claim, seeing that the hero owns no higher name than that of – A Soldier of Fortune.

CHAPTER I. 'THE DAYS OF THE GUILLOTINE'

Neither the tastes nor the temper of the age we live in are such as to induce any man to boast of his family nobility. We see too many preparations around us for laying down new foundations, to think it a suitable occasion for alluding to the ancient edifice. I will, therefore, confine myself to saying, that I am not to be regarded as a mere pretender because my name is not chronicled by Burke or Debrett. My great-grandfather, after whom I am called, served on the personal staff of King James at the Battle of the Boyne, and was one of the few who accompanied the monarch on his flight from the field, for which act of devotion he was created a peer of Ireland, by the style and title of Timmahoo – Lord Tiernay, of Timmahoo the family called it – and a very rich-sounding and pleasant designation has it always seemed to me.

The events of the time, the scanty intervals of leisure enjoyed by the king, and other matters, prevented a due registry of my ancestors' claims; and, in fact, when more peaceable days succeeded, it was judged prudent to say nothing about a matter which might revive unhappy recollections, and open old scores, seeing that there was now another king on the throne 'who knew not Joseph'; and so, for this reason and many others, my

greatgrandfather went back to his old appellation of Maurice Tiernay, and was only a lord among his intimate friends and cronies of the neighbourhood.

That I am simply recording a matter of fact, the patent of my ancestors' nobility, now in my possession, will sufficiently attest. nor is its existence the less conclusive, that it is inscribed on the back of his commission as a captain in the Shanabogue Fencibles – the well-known 'Clear-the-way-boy s' – a proud title, it is said, to which they imparted a new reading at the memorable battle aforementioned.

The document bears the address of a small public-house called the 'Nest,' on the Kells road, and contains in one corner a somewhat lengthy score for potables, suggesting the notion that his Majesty sympathised with vulgar infirmities, and found, as the old song says, 'that grief and sorrow are dry.'

The prudence which for some years sealed my greatgrandfather's lips, lapsed, after a time, into a careless and even boastful spirit, in which he would allude to his rank in the peerage, the place he ought to be holding, and so on: till at last, some of the Government people, doubtless taking a liking to the snug house and demesne of Timmahoo, denounced him as a rebel, on which he was arrested and thrown into gaol, where he lingered for many years, and only came out at last to find his estate confiscated, and himself a beggar.

There was a small gathering of Jacobites in one of the towns of Flanders, and thither he repaired; but how he lived, or how he

died, I never learned. I only know that his son wandered away to the east of Europe, and took service in what was called Trenck's Pandours – as jolly a set of robbers as ever stalked the map of Europe, from one side to the other. This was my grandfather, whose name is mentioned in various chronicles of that estimable corps, and who was hanged at Prague afterwards, for an attempt to carry off an archduchess of the empire, to whom, by the way, there is good reason to believe he was privately married. This suspicion was strengthened by the fact that his infant child, Joseph, was at once adopted by the imperial family, and placed as a pupil in the great military school of Vienna. From thence he obtained a commission in the Maria Theresa Hussars, and subsequently, being sent on a private mission to France, entered the service of Louis xvi., where he married a lady of the Queen's household – a Mademoiselle de la Lasterie – of high rank and some fortune; and with whom he lived happily till the dreadful events of 17 – , when she lost her life, beside my father, then fighting as a Garde du Corps, on the staircase at Versailles. How he himself escaped on that day, and what were the next features in his history, I never knew; but when again we heard of him, he was married to the widow of a celebrated orator of the Mountain, and he himself an intimate friend of St. Just and Marat, and all the most violent of the Republicans.

My father's history about this period is involved in such obscurity, and his second marriage followed so rapidly on the death of his first wife, that, strange as it may seem, I never knew

which of the two was my mother – the lineal descendant of a house, noble before the Crusades, or – the humble *bourgeoise* of the Quartier St. Denis. What peculiar line of political action my father followed I am unable to say, nor whether he was suspected with or without due cause; but suspected he certainly was, and at a time when suspicion was all-sufficient for conviction. He was arrested, and thrown into the Temple, where I remember I used to visit him every week; and whence I accompanied him one morning, as he was led forth with a string of others to the Place de Grève, to be guillotined. I believe he was accused of royalism; and I know that a white cockade was found among his effects, and in mockery was fastened on his shoulder on the day of his execution. This emblem, deep dyed with blood, and still dripping, was taken up by a bystander, and pinned on my cap, with the savage observation, ‘Voilà, it is the proper colour; see that you profit by the way it became so.’ As, with a bursting heart, and a head wild with terror, I turned to find my way homeward, I felt my hand grasped by another – I looked up, and saw an old man, whose threadbare black clothes and emaciated appearance bespoke the priest in the times of the Convention.

‘You have no home now, my poor boy,’ said he to me; ‘come and share mine.’

I did not ask him why. I seemed to have suddenly become reckless as to everything present or future. The terrible scene I had witnessed had dried up all the springs of my youthful heart; and, infant as I was, I was already a sceptic as to everything

good or generous in human nature. I followed him, therefore, without a word, and we walked on, leaving the thoroughfares and seeking the less frequented streets, till we arrived in what seemed a suburban part of Paris – at least the houses were surrounded with trees and shrubs; and at a distance I could see the hill of Montmartre and its windmills – objects well known to me by many a Sunday visit.

Even after my own home, the poverty of the Père Michel's household was most remarkable: he had but one small room, of which a miserable settle-bed, two chairs, and a table constituted all the furniture; there was no fireplace, a little pan for charcoal supplying the only means for warmth or cookery; a crucifix and a few coloured prints of saints decorated the whitewashed walls; and, with a string of wooden beads, a cloth skull-cap, and a bracket with two or three books, made up the whole inventory of his possessions; and yet, as he closed the door behind him, and drew me towards him to kiss my cheek, the tears glistened in his eyes with gratitude as he said —

‘Now, my dear Maurice, you are at home.’

‘How do you know that I am called Maurice?’ said I, in astonishment.

‘Because I was an old friend of your poor father, my child; we came from the same country – we held the same faith, had the same hopes, and may one day yet, perhaps, have the same fate.’

He told me that the closest friendship had bound them together for years past, and in proof of it showed me a variety of

papers which my father had intrusted to his keeping, well aware, as it would seem, of the insecurity of his own life.

‘He charged me to take you home with me, Maurice, should the day come when this might come to pass. You will now live with me, and I will be your father, so far, at least, as humble means will suffer me.’

I was too young to know how deep my debt of gratitude ought to be. I had not tasted the sorrows of utter desertion; nor did I know from what a hurricane of blood and anarchy Fortune had rescued me; still I accepted the père’s benevolent offer with a thankful heart, and turned to him at once as to all that was left to me in the world.

All this time, it may be wondered how I neither spoke nor thought of my mother, if she were indeed such; but for several weeks before my father’s death I had never seen her, nor did he ever once allude to her. The reserve thus imposed upon me remained still, and I felt as though it would have been like a treachery to his memory were I now to speak of her whom, in his lifetime, I had not dared to mention.

The père lost no time in diverting my mind from the dreadful events I had so lately witnessed. The next morning, soon after daybreak, I was summoned to attend him to the little church of St. Blois, where he said mass. It was a very humble little edifice, which once had been the private chapel of a château, and stood in a weed-grown, neglected garden, where broken statues and smashed fountains bore evidence of the visits of the

destroyer. A rude effigy of St. Blois, upon whom some profane hand had stuck a Phrygian cap of liberty, and which none were bold enough to displace, stood over the doorway; except this, not a vestige of ornament or decoration existed. The altar, covered with a white cloth, displayed none of the accustomed emblems, and a rude crucifix of oak was the only symbol of the faith remaining. Small as was the building, it was even too spacious for the few who came to worship. The terror which prevailed on every side – the dread that devotion to religion should be construed into an adherence to the monarchy, that submission to God should be interpreted as an act of rebellion against the sovereignty of human will – had gradually thinned the numbers, till at last the few who came were only those whose afflictions had steeled them against any reverses, and who were ready martyrs to whatever might betide them. These were almost exclusively women – the mothers and wives of those who had sealed their faith with their blood in the terrible Place de Grève. Among them was one whose dress and appearance, although not different from the rest, always created a movement of respect as she passed in or out of the chapel. She was a very old lady, with hair white as snow, and who led by the hand a little girl of about my own age; her large dark eyes and brilliant complexion giving her a look of unearthly beauty in that assemblage of furrowed cheeks, and eyes long dimmed by weeping. It was not alone that her features were beautifully regular, or that their lines were fashioned in the very perfection of symmetry, but there was a certain character in

the expression of the face so different from all around it, as to be almost electrical in effect. Untouched by the terrible calamities that weighed on every heart, she seemed, in the glad buoyancy of her youth, to be at once above the very reach of sorrow, like one who bore a charmed fate, and whom Fortune had exempted from all the trials of this life. So at least did I read those features, as they beamed upon me in such a contrast to the almost stern character of the sad and sorrow-struck faces of the rest.

It was a part of my duty to place a footstool each morning for the 'Marquise,' as she was distinctively called, and on these occasions it was that I used to gaze upon that little girl's face with a kind of admiring wonder that lingered in my heart for hours after. The bold look with which she met mine, if it at first half abashed, at length encouraged me; and as I stole noiselessly away, I used to feel as though I carried with me some portion of that high hope which bounded within her own heart. Strange magnetism! it seemed as though her spirit whispered to me not to be downhearted or depressed – that the sorrows of life came and went as shadows pass over the earth – that the season of mourning was fast passing, and that for us the world would wear a brighter and more glorious aspect.

Such were the thoughts her dark eyes revealed to me, and such the hopes I caught up from her proud features.

It is easy to colour a life of monotony; any hue may soon tinge the outer surface, and thus mine speedily assumed a hopeful cast; not the less decided, that the distance was lost in vague

uncertainty. The nature of my studies – and the père kept me rigidly to the desk – offered little to the discursiveness of fancy. The rudiments of Greek and Latin, the lives of saints and martyrs, the litanies of the Church, the invocations peculiar to certain holy-days, chiefly filled up my time, when not sharing those menial offices which our poverty exacted from our own hands.

Our life was of the very simplest; except a cup of coffee each morning at daybreak, we took but one meal; our drink was always water. By what means even the humble fare we enjoyed was procured I never knew, for I never saw money in the père's possession, nor did he ever appear to buy anything.

For about two hours in the week I used to enjoy entire liberty, as the père was accustomed every Saturday to visit certain persons of his flock who were too infirm to go abroad. On these occasions he would leave me with some thoughtful injunction about reflection or pious meditation, perhaps suggesting, for my amusement, the life of St. Vincent de Paul, or some other of those adventurous spirits whose missions among the Indians are so replete with heroic struggles; but still with free permission for me to walk out at large and enjoy myself as I liked best. We lived so near the outer boulevard that I could already see the open country from our windows; but fair and enticing as seemed the sunny slopes of Montmartre – bright as glanced the young leaves of spring in the gardens at its foot – I ever turned my steps into the crowded city, and sought the thoroughfares where the great

human tide rolled fullest.

There were certain spots which held a kind of supernatural influence over me – one of these was the Temple, another was the Place de Grève. The window at which my father used to sit, from which, as a kind of signal, I have so often seen his red kerchief floating, I never could pass now, without stopping to gaze at – now, thinking of him who had been its inmate; now, wondering who might be its present occupant. It needed not the onward current of population that each Saturday bore along, to carry me to the Place de Grève. It was the great day of the guillotine, and as many as two hundred were often led out to execution. Although the spectacle had now lost every charm of excitement to the population, from its frequency, it had become a kind of necessity to their existence, and the sight of blood alone seemed to slake that feverish thirst for vengeance which no sufferings appeared capable of satiating. It was rare, however, when some great and distinguished criminal did not absorb all the interest of the scene. It was at that period when the fierce tyrants of the Convention had turned upon each other, and sought, by denouncing those who had been their bosom friends, to seal their new allegiance to the people. There was something demoniacal in the exultation with which the mob witnessed the fate of those whom, but a few weeks back, they had acknowledged as their guides and teachers. The uncertainty of human greatness appeared the most glorious recompense to those whose station debarred them from all the enjoyments of power, and they stood by the death-agonies of

their former friends with a fiendish joy that all the sufferings of their enemies had never yielded.

To me the spectacle had all the fascination that scenes of horror exercise over the mind of youth. I knew nothing of the terrible conflict, nothing of the fierce passions enlisted in the struggle, nothing of the sacred names so basely polluted, nothing of that remorseless vengeance with which the low born and degraded were still hounded on to slaughter. It was a solemn and a fearful sight, but it was no more; and I gazed upon every detail of the scene with an interest that never wandered from the spot whereon it was enacted. If the parade of soldiers, of horse, foot, and artillery, gave these scenes a character of public justice, the horrible mobs, who chanted ribald songs, and danced around the guillotine, suggested the notion of popular vengeance; so that I was lost in all my attempts to reconcile the reasons of these executions with the circumstances that accompanied them.

Not daring to inform the Père Michel of where I had been, I could not ask him for any explanation; and thus was I left to pick up from the scattered phrases of the crowd what was the guilt alleged against the criminals. In many cases the simple word 'Chouan,' of which I knew not the import, was all I heard; in others, jeering allusions to former rank and station would be uttered; while against some the taunt would imply that they had shed tears over others who fell as enemies of the people, and that such sympathy was a costly pleasure to be paid for but with a life's-blood. Such entire possession of me had these awful sights

taken, that I lived in a continual dream of them. The sound of every cart-wheel recalled the dull rumble of the hurdle – every distant sound seemed like the far-off hum of the coming multitude – every sudden noise suggested the clanking drop of the guillotine! My sleep had no other images, and I wandered about my little round of duties pondering over this terrible theme.

Had I been less occupied with my own thoughts, I must have seen that the Père Michel was suffering under some great calamity. The poor priest became wasted to a shadow; for entire days long he would taste of nothing; sometimes he would be absent from early morning to late at night, and when he did return, instead of betaking himself to rest, he would drop down before the crucifix in an agony of prayer, and thus spend more than half the night. Often and often have I, when feigning sleep, followed him as he recited the litanies of the breviary, adding my own muttered prayers to his, and beseeching for a mercy whose object I knew not.

For some time his little chapel had been closed by the authorities; a heavy padlock and two massive seals being placed upon the door, and a notice, in a vulgar handwriting, appended, to the effect that it was by the order of the Commissary of the Department. Could this be the source of the père's sorrow? or did not his affliction seem too great for such a cause? were questions I asked myself again and again.

In this state were matters, when one morning – it was a Saturday – the priest enjoined me to spend the day in prayer,

reciting particularly the liturgies for the dead, and all those sacred offices for those who have just departed this life.

‘Pray unceasingly, my dear child – pray with your whole heart, as though it were for one you loved best in the world. I shall not return, perhaps, till late to-night; but I will kiss you then, and to-morrow we shall go into the woods together.’

The tears fell from his cheek to mine as he said this, and his damp hand trembled as he pressed my fingers. My heart was full to bursting at his emotion, and I resolved faithfully to do his bidding. To watch him as he went, I opened the sash, and as I did so, the sound of a distant drum, the well-known muffled roll, floated on the air, and I remembered it was the day of the guillotine – that day in which my feverish spirit turned, as it were in relief, to the reality of blood. Remote as was the part of the city we lived in, I could still mark the hastening steps of the foot-passengers, as they listened to the far-off summons, and see the tide was setting towards the fatal Place de Grève. It was a lowering, heavy morning, overcast with clouds, and on its loaded atmosphere sounds moved slowly and indistinctly; yet I could trace through all the din of the great city, the incessant roll of the drums, and the loud shouts that burst forth, from time to time, from some great multitude.

Forgetting everything save my intense passion for scenes of terror, I hastened down the stairs into the street, and at the top of my speed hurried to the place of execution. As I went along, the crowded streets and thronged avenues told of some event of

more than common interest; and in the words which fell from those around me, I could trace that some deep Royalist plot had just been discovered, and that the conspirators would all on that day be executed. Whether it was that the frequent sight of blood was beginning to pall upon the popular appetite, or that these wholesale massacres interested less than the sight of individual suffering, I know not; but certainly there was less of exultation, less of triumphant scorn in the tone of the speakers. They talked of the coming event as of a common occurrence, which, from mere repetition, was gradually losing interest.

‘I thought we had done with these Chouans,’ said a man in a blouse, with a paper cap on his head. ‘*Pardie!* they must have been more numerous than we ever suspected.’

‘That they were, citizen,’ said a haggard-looking fellow, whose features showed the signs of recent strife; ‘they were the millions who gorged and fed upon us for centuries – who sipped the red grape of Bordeaux, while you and I drank the water of the Seine.’

‘Well, their time is come now,’ cried a third.

‘And when will ours come?’ asked a fresh-looking, dark-eyed girl, whose dress bespoke her trade as a flower-girl, ‘or do you call this our time, my masters, when Paris has no more pleasant sight than blood, nor any music save the “*Ça ira*” that drowns the cries of the guillotine? Is this our time, when we have lost those who gave us bread, and got in their place only those who would feed us with carnage?’

‘Down with her! down with the Chouane! *à bas la Royaliste!*’

cried the pale-faced fellow; and he struck the girl with his fist upon her face, and left it covered with blood.

‘To the Lantern with her – to the Seine!’ shouted several voices; and now, rudely seizing her by the shoulders, the mob seemed bent upon sudden vengeance; while the poor girl, letting fall her basket, begged with clasped hands for mercy.

‘See here, see here, comrades,’ cried a fellow, stooping down among the flowers, ‘she is a Royalist: here are lilies hid beneath the rest.’

What sad consequences this discovery might have led to, there is no knowing; when, suddenly, a violent rush of the crowd turned every thought into a different direction. It was caused by a movement of the *Gendarmerie à cheval*, who were clearing the way for the approaching procession. I had just time to place the poor girl’s basket in her hands, as the onward impulse of the dense mob carried me forward. I saw her no more. A flower – I know not how it came there – was in my bosom, and seeing that it was a lily, I placed it within my cap for concealment.

The hoarse clangour of the bassoons – the only instruments which played during the march – now told that the procession was approaching; and then I could see, above the heads of the multitude, the leopard-skin helmets of the dragoons, who led the way. Save this I could see nothing, as I was borne along in the vast torrent towards the place of execution. Slowly as we moved, our progress was far more rapid than that of the procession, which was often obliged to halt from the density of the mob in front. We

arrived, therefore, at the Place a considerable time before it; and now I found myself beside the massive wooden railing placed to keep off the crowd from the space around the guillotine.

It was the first time I had ever stood so close to the fatal spot, and my eyes devoured every detail with the most searching intensity. The colossal guillotine itself, painted red, and with its massive axe suspended aloft – the terrible basket, half filled with sawdust, beneath – the coarse table, on which a rude jar and a cup were placed – and, more disgusting than all, the lounging group, who, with their newspapers in hand, seemed from time to time to watch if the procession were approaching. They sat beneath a misshapen statue of wood, painted red like the guillotine. This was the goddess of Liberty. I climbed one of the pillars of the paling, and could now see the great cart, which, like a boat upon wheels, came slowly along, dragged by six horses. It was crowded with people, so closely packed that they could not move their bodies, and only waved their hands, which they did incessantly. They seemed, too, as if they were singing; but the deep growl of the bassoons, and the fierce howlings of the mob, drowned all other sounds. As the cart came nearer, I could distinguish the faces, amid which were those of age and youth, men and women, bold-visaged boys and fair girls – some, whose air bespoke the very highest station, and beside them, the hardy peasant, apparently more amazed than terrified at all he saw around him. On they came, the great cart surging heavily, like a bark in a stormy sea; and now it cleft the dense ocean that filled

the Place, and I could descry the lineaments wherein the stiffened lines of death were already marked. Had any touch of pity still lingered in that dense crowd, there might well have been some show of compassion for the sad convoy, whose faces grew ghastly with terror as they drew near the horrible engine.

Down the furrowed cheek of age the heavy tears coursed freely, and sobs and broken prayers burst forth from hearts that until now had beat high and proudly.

‘There is the Due d’Angeac,’ cried a fellow, pointing to a venerable old man, who was seated at the corner of the cart with an air of calm dignity; ‘I know him well, for I was his perruquier.’

‘His hair must be content with sawdust this morning, instead of powder,’ said another; and a rude laugh followed the ruffian jest.

‘See! mark that woman with the long dark hair – that is La Bretonville, the actress of the St. Martin.’

‘I have often seen her represent terror far more naturally,’ cried a fashionably dressed man, as he stared at the victim through his opera-glass.

‘Bah!’ replied his friend, ‘she despises her audience, *voilà tout*. Look, Henri, if that little girl beside her be not Lucille, of the Pantheon.’

‘*Parbleu!* so it is. Why, they’ll not leave a pirouette in the Grand Opera. *Pauvre petite*, what had you to do with politics?’

‘Her little feet ought to have saved her head any day.’

‘See how grim that old lady beside her looks; I’d swear she is

more shocked at the company she's thrown into than the fate that awaits her. I never saw a glance of prouder disdain than she has just bestowed on poor Lucille.'

'That is the old Marquise d'Estelles, the very essence of our old nobility. They used to talk of their *mésalliance* with the Bourbons as the first misfortune of their house.' 'Pardi! they have lived to learn deeper sorrows.' I had by this time discovered her they were speaking of, whom I recognised at once as the old marquise of the chapel of St. Blois. My hands nearly gave up their grasp as I gazed on those features, which so often I had seen fixed in prayer, and which now – a thought paler, perhaps – wore the self-same calm expression. With what intense agony I peered into the mass, to see if the little girl, her granddaughter, were with her; and, oh! the deep relief I felt as I saw nothing but strange faces on every side. It was terrible to feel, as my eyes ranged over that vast mass, where grief, and despair, and heart-sinking terror were depicted, that I should experience a spirit of joy and thankfulness; and yet I did so, and with my lips I uttered my gratitude that she was spared! But I had not time for many reflections like this; already the terrible business of the day had begun, and the prisoners were now descending from the cart, ranging themselves, as their names were called, in a line below the scaffold. With a few exceptions, they took their places in all the calm of seeming indifference. Death had long familiarised itself to their minds in a thousand shapes. Day by day they had seen the vacant places left by those led out to die, and if their sorrows had not rendered them careless

of life, the world itself had grown distasteful to them. In some cases a spirit of proud scorn was manifested to the very last; and, strange inconsistency of human nature! the very men whose licentiousness and frivolity first evoked the terrible storm of popular fury, were the first to display the most chivalrous courage in the terrible face of the guillotine. Beautiful women, too, in all the pride of their loveliness, met the inhuman stare of that mob undismayed. Nor were these traits without their fruits. This noble spirit – this triumphant victory of the well born and the great – was a continual insult to the populace, who saw themselves defrauded of half their promised vengeance, and they learned that they might kill, but they could never humiliate them. In vain they dipped their hands in the red life-blood, and, holding up their dripping fingers, asked – ‘How did it differ from that of the people?’ Their hearts gave the lie to the taunt; for they witnessed instances of heroism, from grey hairs and tender womanhood, that would have shamed the proudest deeds of their new-born chivalry!

‘Charles Grégoire Courcelles!’ shouted out a deep voice from the scaffold.

‘That is my name,’ said a venerable-looking old gentleman, as he arose from his seat, adding, with a placid smile, ‘but for half a century my friends have called me the Duc de Riancourt.’

‘We have no dukes nor marquises; we know of no titles in France,’ replied the functionary. ‘All men are equal before the law.’

‘If it were so, my friend, you and I might change places; for you were my steward, and plundered my château.’

‘Down with the Royalist – away with the aristocrat!’ shouted a number of voices from the crowd.

‘Be a little patient, good people,’ said the old man, as he ascended the steps with some difficulty; ‘I was wounded in Canada, and have never yet recovered. I shall probably be better a few minutes hence.’

There was something of half simplicity in the careless way the words were uttered that hushed the multitude, and already some expressions of sympathy were heard; but as quickly the ribald insults of the hired ruffians of the Convention drowned these sounds, and ‘Down with the Royalist’ resounded on every side, while two officials assisted him to remove his stock and bare his throat. The commissary, advancing to the edge of the platform, and, as it were, addressing the people, read in a hurried, slurring kind of voice, something that purported to be the ground of the condemnation. But of this not a word could be heard. None cared to hear the ten-thousand-time told tale of suspected Royalism, nor would listen to the high-sounding declamation that proclaimed the virtuous zeal of the Government – their untiring energy – their glorious persistence in the cause of the people. The last words were as usual responded to with an echoing shout, and the cry of ‘*Vive la République!*’ rose from the great multitude.

‘*Vive le Roi!*’ cried the old man, with a voice heard high above the clamour; but the words were scarce out when the lips that

uttered them were closed in death; so sudden was the act, that a cry burst forth from the mob, but whether in reprobation or in ecstasy I know not.

I will not follow the sad catalogue, wherein nobles, and peasants, priests, soldiers, actors, men of obscure fortune, and women of lofty station, succeeded each other, occupying for a brief minute every eye, and passing away for ever. Many ascended the platform without a word; some waved a farewell towards a distant quarter, where they suspected a friend to be; others spent their last moments in prayer, and died in the very act of supplication. All bore themselves with a noble and proud courage; and now some five or six alone remained of whose fate none seemed to guess the issue, since they had been taken from the Temple by some mistake, and were not included in the list of the commissary. There they sat, at the foot of the scaffold, speechless and stupefied – they looked as though it were matter of indifference to which side their steps should turn – to the gaol or the guillotine. Among these was the marquise, who alone preserved her proud self-possession, and sat in all her accustomed dignity; while close beside her an angry controversy was maintained as to their future destiny – the commissary firmly refusing to receive them for execution, and the delegate of the Temple, as he was styled, as flatly asserting that he would not reconduct them to prison. The populace soon grew interested in the dispute, and the most violent altercations arose among the partisans of each side of the question.

Meanwhile the commissary and his assistants prepared to depart. Already the massive drapery of red cloth was drawn over the guillotine, and every preparation made for withdrawing, when the mob, doubtless dissatisfied that they should be defrauded of any portion of the entertainment, began to climb over the wooden barricades, and, with furious cries and shouts, threaten vengeance upon any who would screen the enemies of the people.

The troops resisted the movement, but rather with the air of men entreating calmness than with the spirit of soldiery. It was plain to see on which side the true force lay.

‘If you will not do it, the people will do it for you,’ whispered the delegate to the commissary; ‘and who is to say where they will stop when their hands once learn the trick!’

The commissary grew lividly pale, and made no reply.

‘See there!’ rejoined the other – ‘they are carrying a fellow on their shoulders yonder – they mean him to be the executioner.’

‘But I dare not – I cannot – without my orders.’

‘Are not the people sovereign? – whose will have we sworn to obey but theirs?’

‘My own head would be the penalty if I yielded.’

‘It will be, if you resist – even now it is too late.’

And as he spoke he sprang from the scaffold, and disappeared in the dense crowd that already thronged the space within the rails.

By this time the populace were not only masters of the area

around, but had also gained the scaffold itself, from which many of them seemed endeavouring to harangue the mob – others contenting themselves with imitating the gestures of the commissary and his functionaries. It was a scene of the wildest uproar and confusion – frantic cries and screams, ribald songs and fiendish yellings on every side. The guillotine was again uncovered, and the great crimson drapery, torn into fragments, was waved about like flags, or twisted into uncouth head-dresses. The commissary, failing in every attempt to restore order peaceably, and either not possessing a sufficient force, or distrusting the temper of the soldiers, descended from the scaffold, and gave the order to march. This act of submission was hailed by the mob with the most furious yell of triumph. Up to that very moment they had never credited the bare possibility of a victory; and now they saw themselves suddenly masters of the field – the troops, in all the array of horse and foot, retiring in discomfiture. The exultation knew no bounds; and, doubtless, had there been amongst them those with skill and daring to profit by the enthusiasm, the torrent had rushed a longer and more terrific course than through the blood-steeped clay of the Place de Grève.

‘Here is the man we want,’ shouted a deep voice. ‘St. Just told us t’ other day that the occasion never failed to produce one; and see, here is “Jean Gougon”; and though he’s but two feet high, his fingers can reach the pin of the guillotine.’

And he held aloft on his shoulders a misshapen dwarf, who

was well known on the Pont Neuf, where he gained his living by singing infamous songs, and performing mockeries of the service of the mass. A cheer of welcome acknowledged this speech, to which the dwarf responded by a mock benediction, which he bestowed with all the ceremonious observance of an archbishop. Shouts of the wildest laughter followed this ribaldry, and in a kind of triumph they carried him up the steps, and deposited him on the scaffold.

Ascending one of the chairs, the little wretch proceeded to address the mob, which he did with all the ease and composure of a practised public speaker. Not a murmur was heard in that tumultuous assemblage, as he, with a most admirable imitation of Hébert, then the popular idol, assured them that France was, at that instant, the envy of surrounding nations; and that, bating certain little weaknesses on the score of humanity – certain traits of softness and over-mercy – her citizens realised all that ever had been said of angels. From thence he passed on to a mimicry of Marat, of Danton, and of Robespierre – tearing off his cravat, baring his breast, and performing all the oft-exhibited antics of the latter, as he vociferated, in a wild scream, the well-known peroration of a speech he had lately made – ‘If we look for a glorious morrow of freedom, the sun of our slavery must set in blood!’

However amused by the dwarfs exhibition, a feeling of impatience began to manifest itself among the mob, who felt that, by any longer delay, it was possible time would be given for

fresh troops to arrive, and the glorious opportunity of popular sovereignty be lost in the very hour of victory.

‘To work – to work, Master Gougon!’ shouted hundreds of rude voices; ‘we cannot spend our day in listening to oratory.’

‘You forget, my dear friends,’ said he blandly, ‘that this is to me a new walk in life. I have much to learn, ere I can acquit myself worthily to the Republic.’

‘We have no leisure for preparatory studies, Gougon,’ cried a fellow below the scaffold.

‘Let me, then, just begin with monsieur,’ said the dwarf, pointing to the last speaker, and a shout of laughter closed the sentence.

A brief and angry dispute now arose as to what was to be done; and it is more than doubtful how the debate might have ended, when Gougon, with a readiness all his own, concluded the discussion by saying —

‘I have it, citizens, I have it! There is a lady here, who, however respectable her family and connections, will leave few to mourn her loss. She is, in a manner, public property, and if not born on the soil, at least a naturalised Frenchwoman. We have done a great deal for her, and in her name, for some time back, and I am not aware of any singular benefit she has rendered us. With your permission, then, I ‘ll begin with her.*

‘Name, name – name her!’ was cried by thousands.

‘*La voilà,*’ said he archly, as he pointed with his thumb to the wooden effigy of Liberty above his head.

The absurdity of the suggestion was more than enough for its success. A dozen hands were speedily at work, and down came the goddess of Liberty! The other details of an execution were hurried over with all the speed of practised address, and the figure was placed beneath the drop. Down fell the axe, and Gougon, lifting up the wooden head, paraded it about the scaffold, crying —

‘Behold! an enemy of France. Long live the Republic, one and indivisible!’

Loud and wild were the shouts of laughter from this brutal mockery; and for a time it almost seemed as if the ribaldry had turned the mob from the sterner passions of their vengeance. This hope, if one there ever cherished it, was short-lived, and again the cry arose for blood. It was too plain that no momentary diversion, no passing distraction, could withdraw them from that lust for cruelty that had now grown into a passion.

And now a bustle and movement of those around the stairs showed that something was in preparation; and in the next moment the old marquise was led forward between two men.

‘Where is the order for this woman’s execution?’ asked the dwarf, mimicking the style and air of the commissary.

‘We give it — it is from us!’ shouted the mob, with one savage roar.

Gougon removed his cap, and bowed in token of obedience.

‘Let us proceed in order, citizens,’ said he gravely; ‘I see no priest here.’

‘Shrive her yourself, Gougou; few know the mummeries better!’ cried a voice.

‘Is there not one here can remember a prayer, or even a verse of the offices,’ said Gougou, with a well-affected horror in his voice.

‘Yes, yes, I do,’ cried I, my zeal overcoming all sense of the mockery in which the words were spoken; ‘I know them all by heart, and can repeat them from “lux beatissima” down to “hora mortis”’; and as if to gain credence for my self-laudation, I began at once to recite, in the sing-song tone of the seminary —

‘Salve, mater salvatoris,
Fons salutis, vas honoris;
Scala coli, porta et via,
Salve semper, O Maria!’

It is possible I should have gone on to the very end, if the uproarious laughter which rung around had not stopped me.

‘There’s a brave youth!’ cried Gougou, pointing towards me, with mock admiration. ‘If it ever come to pass — as what may not in these strange times? — that we turn to priestcraft again, thou shalt be the first archbishop of Paris. Who taught thee that famous canticle?’

‘The Père Michel,’ replied I, in no way conscious of the ridicule bestowed upon me; ‘the Père Michel of St. Blois.’

The old lady lifted up her head at these words, and her dark eyes rested steadily upon me; and then, with a sign of her hand,

she motioned to me to come over to her.

‘Yes; let him come,’ said Gougou, as if answering the half-reluctant glances of the crowd. And now I was assisted to descend, and passed along over the heads of the people, till I was placed upon the scaffold. Never can I forget the terror of that moment, as I stood within a few feet of the terrible guillotine, and saw beside me the horrid basket splashed with recent blood.

‘Look not at these things, child,’ said the old lady, as she took my hand and drew me towards her, ‘but listen to me, and mark my words well.’

‘I will, I will,’ cried I, as the hot tears rolled down my cheeks.

‘Tell the père – you will see him to-night – tell him that I have changed my mind, and resolved upon another course, and that he is not to leave Paris. Let them remain. The torrent runs too rapidly to last. This cannot endure much longer. We shall be among the last victims. You hear me, child?’

‘I do, I do,’ cried I, sobbing. ‘Why is not the Père Michel with you now?’

‘Because he is suing for my pardon – asking for mercy where its very name is a derision. Kneel down beside me, and repeat the “Angelus.”’

I took off my cap, and knelt down at her feet, reciting, in a voice broken by emotion, the words of the prayer. She repeated each syllable after me, in a tone full and unshaken, and then stooping, she took up the lily which lay in my cap. She pressed it to her lips two or three times passionately. ‘Give it to *her*; tell

her I kissed it at my last moment. Tell her – ’

‘This “shrift” is beyond endurance. Away, holy father!’ cried Gougou, as he pushed me rudely back, and seized the marquise by the wrist. A faint cry escaped her. I heard no more; for, jostled and pushed about by the crowd, I was driven to the very rails of the scaffold. Stepping beneath these, I mingled with the mob beneath; and burning with eagerness to escape a scene, to have witnessed which would almost have made my heart break, I forced my way into the dense mass, and, by squeezing and creeping, succeeded at last in penetrating to the verge of the Place. A terrible shout, and a rocking motion of the mob, like the heavy surging of the sea, told me that all was over; but I never looked back to the fatal spot, but, having gained the open streets, ran at the top of my speed towards home.

CHAPTER II. THE RESTAURANT 'AU SCELERAT'

As I gained the street, at a distance from the Place, I was able to increase my speed; and I did so with an eagerness as if the world depended on my haste. At any other time I would have bethought me of my disobedience to the père's commands, and looked forward to meeting him with shame and sorrow, but now I felt a kind of importance in the charge intrusted to me. I regarded my mission as something superior to any petty consideration of self, while the very proximity in which I had stood to peril and death made me seem a hero in my own eyes.

At last I reached the street where we lived, and, almost breathless with exertion, gained the door. What was my amazement, however, to find it guarded by a sentry, a large, solemn-looking fellow, with a tattered cocked-hat on his head, and a pair of worn striped trousers on his legs, who cried out, as I appeared, 'Halte-là!' in a voice that at once arrested my steps.

'Where to, youngster?' said he, in a somewhat melted tone, seeing the shock his first words had caused me.

'I am going home, sir,' said I submissively; 'I live at the third storey, in the apartment of the Père Michel.'

'The Père Michel will live there no longer, my boy; his apartment is now in the Temple,' said he slowly.

‘In the Temple!’ said I, whose memory at once recalled my father’s fate; and then, unable to control my feelings, I sat down upon the steps and burst into tears.

‘There, there, child, you must not cry thus,’ said he; ‘these are not days when one should weep over misfortunes; they come too fast and too thick on all of us for that. The père was your tutor, I suppose?’

I nodded.

‘And your father – where is he?’

‘Dead.’

He made a sign to imitate the guillotine, and I assented by another nod.

‘Was he a Royalist, boy?’

‘He was an officer in the Garde du Corps,’ said I proudly. The soldier shook his head mournfully, but with what meaning I know not.

‘And your mother, boy?’

‘I do not know where she is,’ said I, again relapsing into tears at the thought of my utter desolation. The old soldier leaned upon his musket in profound thought, and for some time did not utter a word. At last he said —

‘There is nothing but the Hôtel de Ville for you, my child. They say that the Republic adopts all the orphans of France. What she does with them I cannot tell.’

‘But I can, though,’ replied I fiercely; ‘the Noyades or the Seine are a quick and sure provision; I saw eighty drowned one morning

below the Pont Neuf myself.'

'That tongue of yours will bring you into trouble, youngster,' said he reprovingly; 'mind that you say not such things as these.'

'What worse fortune can betide me than to see my father die at the guillotine, and my last, my only friend, carried away to prison?'

'You have no care for your own neck, then?'

'Why should I – what value has life for me?'

'Then it will be spared to you,' said he sententiously; 'mark my words, lad. You never need fear death till you begin to love life. Get up, my poor boy; you must not be found there when the relief comes, and that will be soon. This is all that I have,' said he, placing three sous in my palm, 'which will buy a loaf; to-morrow there may be better luck in store for you.'

I shook the rough hand he offered with cordial gratitude, and resolved to bear myself as like a man as I could. I drew myself up, touched my cap in soldierlike fashion, and cried out, adieu – and then, descending into the street, hurried away to hide the tears that were almost suffocating me.

Hour after hour I walked the streets; the mere act of motion seemed to divert my grief, and it was only when, footsore and weary, I could march no longer, that my sorrows came back in full force, and overwhelmed me in their flow. It was less pride or shame than a sense of my utter helplessness, that prevented me addressing any one of the hundreds who passed me. I bethought me of my inability to do anything for my own support, and

it was this consciousness that served to weigh me down more than all else; and yet I felt with what devotion I could serve him who would but treat me with the kindness he might bestow upon his dog; I fancied with what zeal I could descend to very slavery for one word of affection. The streets were crowded with people; groups were gathered here and there, either listening to some mob orator of the day, or hearing the newspapers read aloud. I tried, by forcing my way into the crowd, to feel myself 'one of them,' and to think that I had my share of interest in what was going forward, but in vain. Of the topics discussed I knew nothing, and of the bystanders none even noticed me. High-swelling phrases met the ear at every moment, that sounded strangely enough to me. They spoke of Fraternity – of that brotherhood which linked man to man in close affection; of Equality – that made all sharers in this world's goods; of Liberty – that gave freedom to every noble aspiration and generous thought; and for an instant, carried away by the glorious illusion, I even forgot my solitary condition, and felt proud of my heritage as a youth of France. I looked around me, however, and what faces met my gaze! The same fearful countenances I had seen around the scaffold – the wretches, blood-stained, and influenced by passion – their bloated cheeks and strained eyeballs glowing with intemperance – their oaths, their gestures – their very voices having something terrible in them. The mockery soon disgusted me, and I moved away, again to wander about without object or direction through the weary streets. It was past midnight when

I found myself, without knowing where I was, in a large open space, in the midst of which a solitary lamp was burning. I approached it and, to my horror, saw that it was the guillotine, over which in mournful cadence a lantern swung, creaking its chain as the night wind stirred it. The dim outline of the fearful scaffold, the fitful light that fell upon the platform, and the silence—all conspired to strike terror into my heart. All I had so lately witnessed seemed to rise up again before me, and the victims seemed to stand up again, pale, and livid, and shuddering, as last I saw them.

I knelt down and tried to pray, but terror was too powerful to suffer my thoughts to take this direction, and, half fainting with fear and exhaustion, I lay down upon the ground and slept – slept beneath the platform of the guillotine. Not a dream crossed my slumber, nor did I awake till dawn of day, when the low rumbling of the peasants' carts aroused me, as they were proceeding to the market. I know not why or whence, but I arose from the damp earth, and looked about me with a more daring and courageous spirit than I had hitherto felt. It was May – the first bright rays of sunshine were slanting along the Place, and the fresh, brisk air felt invigorating and cheering. Whither to? asked I of myself, and my eyes turned from the dense streets and thoroughfares of the great city to the far-off hills beyond the barrier, and for a moment I hesitated which road to take. I almost seemed to feel as if the decision involved my whole future fortune – whether I should live and die in the humble condition of a peasant, or play

for a great stake in life. Yes, said I, after a short hesitation, I will remain here – in the terrible conflict going forward, many must be new adventurers, and never was any one more greedy to learn the trade than myself. I will throw sorrow behind me. Yesterday's tears are the last I shall shed. Now for a bold heart and a ready will, and here goes for the world! With these stout words I placed my cap jauntily on one side of my head, and with a fearless air marched off for the very centre of the city.

For some hours I amused myself gazing at the splendid shops, or staring in at the richly decorated cafés, where the young celebrities of the day were assembled at breakfast, in all the extravagance of the newfangled costume. Then I followed the Guard to the parade at the 'Carrousel,' and listened to the band; quitting which I wandered along the quays, watching the boats as they dragged the river in search of murdered bodies or suicides. Thence I returned to the Palais-Royal and listened to the news of the day, as read out by some elected enlightener of his countrymen.

By what chance I know not, but at last my rambling steps brought me opposite to the great solemn-looking towers of the 'Temple.' The gloomy prison, within whose walls hundreds were then awaiting the fate which already their friends had suffered – little groups, gathered here and there in the open Place, were communicating to the prisoners by signs and gestures, and from many a small-grated window, at an immense height, handkerchiefs were seen to wave in recognition of those

below. These signals seemed to excite neither watchfulness nor prevention – indeed, they needed none; and perhaps the very suspense they excited was a torture that pleased the inhuman gaolers. Whatever the reason, the custom was tolerated, and was apparently enjoyed at that moment by several of the turnkeys, who sat at the windows, much amused at the efforts made to communicate. Interested by the sight, I sat down upon a stone bench to watch the scene, and fancied that I could read something of the rank and condition of those who signalled from below their messages of hope or fear. At last a deep bell within the prison tolled the hour of noon; and now every window was suddenly deserted. It was the hour for the muster of the prisoners, which always took place before the dinner at one o'clock. The curious groups soon after broke up. A few lingered around the gate, with, perhaps, some hope of admission to visit their friends; but the greater number departed.

My hunger was now such that I could no longer deny myself the long-promised meal, and I looked about me for a shop where I might buy a loaf of bread. In my search, I suddenly found myself opposite an immense shop, where viands of every tempting description were ranged with all that artistic skill so purely Parisian, making up a picture whose composition Snyders would not have despised. Over the door was a painting of a miserable wretch, with hands bound behind him, and his hair cut close in the well-known crop for the scaffold; and underneath was written, 'Au Scélérat'; while on a larger board, in gilt letters,

ran the inscription: —

‘Boivin Père et fils,

Traiteurs pour MM. les Condamnées.’

I could scarcely credit my eyes, as I read and re-read this infamous announcement; but there it stood, and in the crowd that poured incessantly to and from the door, I saw the success that attended the traffic. A ragged knot were gathered around the window, eagerly gazing at something, which, by their exclamations, seemed to claim all their admiration. I pressed forward to see what it was, and beheld a miniature guillotine, which, turned by a wheel, was employed to chop the meat for sausages. This it was that formed the great object of attraction, even to those to whom the prototype had grown flat and uninteresting.

Disgusted as I was by this shocking sight, I stood watching all that went forward within with a strange interest. It was a scene of incessant bustle and movement; for now, as one o'clock drew nigh, various dinners were being prepared for the prisoners, while parties of their friends were assembling inside. Of these latter there seemed persons of every rank and condition; some, dressed in all the brilliancy of the mode; others, whose garments bespoke direst poverty. There were women, too, whose costume emulated the classic drapery of the ancients, and who displayed, in their looped togas, no niggard share of their forms; while others, in shabby mourning, sat in obscure corners, not noticing the scene before them, nor noticed themselves. A

strange equipage, with two horses extravagantly bedizened with rosettes and bouquets, stood at the door; and, as I looked, a pale, haggard-looking man, whose foppery in dress contrasted oddly with his careworn expression, hurried from the shop and sprang into the carriage. In doing so, a pocket-book fell from his pocket. I took it up; but as I did so, the carriage was already away, and far beyond my power to overtake it.

Without stopping to examine my prize, or hesitating for a second, I entered the restaurant, and asked for M. Boivin.

‘Give your orders to me, boy,’ said a man busily at work behind the counter.

‘My business is with himself,’ said I stoutly.

‘Then you ‘ll have to wait with some patience,’ said he sneeringly.

‘I can do so,’ was my answer, and I sat down in the shop.

I might have been half an hour thus seated, when an enormously fat man, with a huge *bonnet rouge* on his head, entered from an inner room, and passing close to where I was, caught sight of me.

‘Who are you, sirrah – what brings you here?’

‘I want to speak with M. Bouvin.’

‘Then speak!’ said he, placing his hand upon his immense chest.

‘It must be alone,’ said I.

‘How so, alone, sirrah?’ said he, growing suddenly pale; ‘I have no secrets – I know of nothing that may not be told before all

the world.’

Though he said this in a kind of appeal to all around, the dubious looks and glances interchanged seemed to make him far from comfortable.

‘So you refuse me, then?’ said I, taking up my cap and preparing to depart.

‘Come hither,’ said he, leading the way into the room from which he had emerged. It was a very small chamber, the most conspicuous ornaments of which were busts and pictures of the various celebrities of the Revolution. Some of these latter were framed ostentatiously, and one, occupying the post of honour above the chimney, at once attracted me, for in a glance I saw that it was a portrait of him who owned the pocket-book, and bore beneath it the name ‘Robespierre.’

‘Now, sir, for your communication,’ said Boivin; ‘and take care that it is of sufficient importance to warrant the interview you have asked for.’

‘I have no fears on that score,’ said I calmly, still scanning the features of the portrait, and satisfying myself of their identity.

‘Look at me, sir, and not at that picture,’ said Boivin.

‘And yet it is of M. Robespierre I have to speak,’ said I coolly.

‘How so – of M. Robespierre, boy? What is the meaning of this? If it be a snare – if this be a trick, you never leave this spot living,’ cried he, as he placed a massive hand on each of my shoulders and shook me violently.

‘I am not so easily to be terrified, citizen,’ said I; ‘nor have I

any secret cause for fear, whatever you may have. My business is of another kind. This morning, in passing out to his carriage, he dropped his pocket-book, which I picked up. Its contents may well be of a kind that should not be read by other eyes than his own. My request is, then, that you will seal it up before me, and then send some one along with me, while I restore it to its owner.'

'Is this a snare – what secret mischief have we here?' said Boivin, half aloud, as he wiped the cold drops of perspiration from his forehead.

'Any mishap that follows will depend upon your refusal to do what I ask.'

'How so – I never refused it; you dare not tell M. Robespierre that I refused, sirrah?'

'I will tell him nothing that is untrue,' said I calmly; for already a sense of power had gifted me with composure. 'If M. Robespierre –'

'Who speaks of me here?' cried the identical personage, as he dashed hurriedly into the room, and then, not waiting for the reply, went on – 'You must send out your scouts on every side – I lost my pocket-book as I left this a while ago.'

'It is here, sir,' said I, presenting it at once.

'How – where was it found – in whose keeping has it been, boy?'

'In mine only; I took it from the ground the same moment that you dropped it, and then came here to place it in M. Boivin's hands.'

‘Who has taken care of it since that time?’ continued Robespierre, with a slow and sneering accentuation on every word.

‘The pocket-book has never left my possession since it quitted yours,’ was my reply.

‘Just so,’ broke in Boivin, now slowly recovering from his terror. ‘Of its contents I know nothing; nor have I sought to know anything.’

Robespierre looked at me as if to corroborate this statement, and I nodded my head in acquiescence.

‘Who is your father, boy?’

‘I have none – he was guillotined.’

‘His name?’

‘Tiernay.’

‘Ah, I remember; he was called *l’Irlandais*.’

‘The same.’

‘A famous Royalist was that same Tiernay, and, doubtless, contrived to leave a heritage of his opinions to his son.’

‘He left me nothing – I have neither house, nor home, nor even bread to eat.’

‘But you have a head to plan, and a heart to feel, youngster; and it is better that fellows like you should not want a dinner. Boivin, look to it that he is taken care of. In a few days I will relieve you of the charge. You will remain here, boy; there are worse resting-places, I promise you. There are men who call themselves teachers of the people, who would ask no better

life than free quarters on Boivin.' And so saying, he hurriedly withdrew, leaving me face to face with my host.

'So then, youngster,' said Boivin, as he scratched his ear thoughtfully, 'I have gained a pensioner! *Parbleu!* if life were not an uncertain thing in these times, there's no saying how long we might not be blessed with your amiable company.'

'You shall not be burthened heavily, citizen,' said I: 'let me have my dinner – I have not eaten since yesterday morning, and I will go my ways peacefully.'

'Which means straight to Robespierre's dwelling, to tell him that I have turned you out of doors – eh, sirrah?'

'You mistake me much,' said I; 'this would be sorry gratitude for eaten bread. I meant what I said – that I will not be an unwelcome guest, even though the alternative be, as it is, something very nigh starvation.'

Boivin did not seem clearly to comprehend the meaning of what I said; or perhaps my whole conduct and bearing puzzled him, for he made no reply for several seconds. At last, with a kind of sigh, he said – 'Well, well, it cannot be helped; it must be even as he wished, though the odds are, he 'll never think more about him. Come, lad, you shall have your dinner.'

I followed him through a narrow, unlighted passage, which opened into a room, where, at a long table, were seated a number of men and boys at dinner. Some were dressed as cooks; others wore a kind of grey blouse, with a badge upon the arm, bearing the name 'Boivin' in large letters, and were, as I afterwards

learned, the messengers employed to carry refreshments into the prison, and who, by virtue of this sign, were freely admitted within the gates.

Taking my place at the board, I proceeded to eat with a voracity that only a long fast could have excused; and thus took but little heed of my companions, whose solecisms in table etiquette might otherwise have amused me.

‘Art a Marmiton, thou?’ asked an elderly man in a cook’s cap, as he stared fixedly at me for some seconds.

‘No,’ said I, helping myself and eating away as before.

‘Thou canst never be a commissionaire, friend, with an appetite like that,’ cried another; ‘I wouldn’t trust thee to carry a casserole to the fire.’

‘Nor shall I be,’ said I coolly.

‘What trade, then, has the good fortune to possess your shining abilities.’

‘A trade that thrives well just now, friend – pass me the flask.’

‘Indeed, and what may it be?’

‘Can you not guess, citizen,’ said I, ‘if I tell you that it was never more in vogue; and, if there be some who will not follow it, they’ll wear their heads just as safely by holding their peace?’

‘*Parbleu!* thou hast puzzled me,’ said the chief cook; ‘and if thou be’st not a coffin-maker – ’ A roar of merriment cut short his speech, in which I myself could not but join heartily.

‘That is, I know,’ said I, ‘a thriving business; but mine is even better; and, not to mystify you longer, I ‘ll just tell you what I am;

which is, simply, a friend of the Citizen Robespierre.'

The blow told with full force; and I saw, in the terrified looks that were interchanged around the table, that my sojourn amongst them, whether destined to be of short or long duration, would not be disturbed by further liberties. It was truly a reign of terror that same period! The great agent of everything was the vague and shadowy dread of some terrible vengeance, against which precautions were all in vain. Men met each other with secret misgivings, and parted with the same dreadful distrust. The ties of kindred were all broken; brotherly affection died out. Existence was become like the struggle for life upon some shipwrecked raft, where each sought safety by his neighbour's doom! At such a time – with such terrible teachings – children became men in all the sterner features of character; cruelty is a lesson so easily learned.

As for myself, energetic and ambitious by nature, the ascendancy my first assumption of power suggested was too grateful a passion to be relinquished. The name – whose spell was like a talisman, because now the secret engine by which I determined to work out my fortune – Robespierre had become to my imagination like the slave of Aladdin's lamp; and to conjure him up was to be all-powerful. Even to Boivin himself this influence extended; and it was easy to perceive that he regarded the whole narrative of the pocket-book as a mere fable, invented to obtain a position as a spy over his household.

I was not unwilling to encourage the belief – it added to my

importance, by increasing the fear I inspired; and thus I walked indolently about, giving myself those airs of *mouchard* that I deemed most fitting, and taking a mischievous delight in the terror I was inspiring.

The indolence of my life, however, soon wearied me, and I began to long for some occupation, or some pursuit. Teeming with excitement as the world was – every day, every hour, brimful of events – it was impossible to sit calmly on the shore, and watch the great, foaming current of human passions, without longing to be in the stream. Had I been a man at that time, I should have become a furious orator of the Mountain – an impassioned leader of the people. The impulse to stand foremost – to take a bold and prominent position – would have carried me to any lengths. I had caught up enough of the horrid fanaticism of the time to think that there was something grand and heroic in contempt for human suffering; that a man rose proudly above all the weakness of his nature, when, in the pursuit of some great object, he stifled within his breast every throb of affection – every sentiment of kindness and mercy. Such were the teachings rife at the time – such the first lessons that boyhood learned; and oh! what a terrible hour had that been for humanity if the generation then born had grown up to manhood unchastened and unconverted!

But to return to my daily life. As I perceived that a week had now elapsed, and the Citizen Robespierre had not revisited the ‘restaurant,’ nor taken any interest in my fate or fortunes, I began to fear lest Boivin should master his terror regarding

me, and take heart to put me out of doors – an event which, in my present incertitude, would have been sorely inconvenient. I resolved, therefore, to practise a petty deception on my host, to sustain the influence of terror over him. This was, to absent myself every day at a certain hour, under the pretence of visiting my patron; letting fall, from time to time, certain indications to show in what part of the city I had been, and occasionally, as if in an unguarded moment, condescending to relate some piece of popular gossip. None ventured to inquire the source of my information – not one dared to impugn its veracity. Whatever their misgivings in secret, to myself they displayed the most credulous faith. Nor was their trust so much misplaced, for I had, in reality, become a perfect chronicle of all that went forward in Paris – never missing a debate in the Convention, where my retentive memory could carry away almost verbally all that I heard – ever present at every public fête or procession, whether the occasions were some insulting desecration of their former faith, or some tasteless mockery of heathen ceremonial.

My powers of mimicry, too, enabled me to imitate all the famous characters of the period; and in my assumed inviolability, I used to exhibit the uncouth gestures and spluttering utterance of Marat – the wild and terrible ravings of Danton – and even the reedy treble of my own patron Robespierre, as he screamed denunciations against the enemies of the people. It is true these exhibitions of mine were only given in secret to certain parties, who, by a kind of instinct, I felt could be trusted.

Such was my life, as one day, returning from the Convention, I beheld a man affixing to a wall a great placard, to which the passing crowd seemed to pay deep attention. It was a decree of the Committee of Public Safety, containing the names of above seven hundred Royalists, who were condemned to death, and who were to be executed in three *tournées*, on three successive days.

For sometime back the mob had not been gratified with a spectacle of this nature. In the ribald language of the day, the 'holy guillotine had grown thirsty from long drought'; and they read the announcement with greedy eyes, commenting as they went upon those whose names were familiar to them. There were many of noble birth among the proscribed, but by far the greater number were priests, the whole sum of whose offending seemed written in the simple and touching words, *ancien curé*, of such a parish! It was strange to mark the bitterness of invective with which the people loaded these poor and innocent men, as though they were the source of all their misfortunes. The lazy indolence with which they reproached them seemed ten times more offensive in their eyes than the lives of ease and affluence led by the nobility. The fact was, they could not forgive men of their own rank and condition what they pardoned in the well born and the noble! an inconsistency that has characterised democracy in other situations beside this.

As I ran my eyes down the list of those confined in the Temple, I came to a name which smote my heart with a pang of

ingratitude as well as sorrow – the ‘Père Michel Delannois, soi disant curé de St. Blois’ – my poor friend and protector was there among the doomed! If, up to that moment, I had made no effort to see him, I must own the reason lay in my own selfish feeling of shame – the dread that he should mark the change that had taken place in me, a change that I felt extended to all about me, and showed itself in my manner as it influenced my every action. It was not alone that I lost the obedient air and quiet submissiveness of the child, but I had assumed the very extravagance of that democratic insolence which was the mode among the leading characters of the time.

How should I present myself before him, the very impersonation of all the vices against which he used to warn me – how exhibit the utter failure of all his teachings and his hopes? What would this be but to embitter his reflections needlessly. Such were the specious reasons with which I fed my self-love, and satisfied my conscience; but now, as I read his name in that terrible catalogue, their plausibility served me no longer, and at last I forgot myself to remember only him.

‘I will see him at once,’ thought I, ‘whatever it may cost me – I will stay beside him for his last few hours of life; and when he carries with him from this world many an evil memory of shame and treachery, ingratitude from me shall not increase the burthen.’ And with this resolve I turned my steps homeward.

CHAPTER III. THE 'TEMPLE'

At the time of which I write, there was but one motive principle throughout France – 'Terror.' By the agency of terror and the threat of denunciation was everything carried on, not only in the public departments of the state, but in all the common occurrences of everyday life. Fathers used it towards their children – children towards their parents; mothers coerced their daughters – daughters, in turn, braved the authority of their mothers. The tribunal of public opinion, open to all, scattered its decrees with a reckless cruelty – denying to-day what it had decreed but yesterday, and at last obliterating every trace of 'right' or 'principle' in a people who now only lived for the passing hour, and who had no faith in the future, even of this world.

Among the very children at play, this horrible doctrine had gained a footing: the tyrant urchin, whose ingenuity enabled him to terrorise, became the master of his playfellows. I was not slow in acquiring the popular education of the period, and soon learned that fear was a 'Bank' on which one might draw at will. Already the domineering habit had given to my air and manner all the insolence of seeming power, and, while a mere boy in years, I was a man in all the easy assumption of a certain importance.

It was with a bold and resolute air I entered the restaurant, and calling Boivin aside, said —

'I have business in the Temple this morning, Boivin; see to it

that I shall not be denied admittance.'

'I am not governor of the gaol,' grunted Boivin sulkily, 'nor have I the privilege to pass any one.'

'But your boys have the entrée; the "rats" (so were they called) are free to pass in and out.'

'Ay, and I'm responsible for the young rascals, too, and for anything that may be laid to their charge.'

'And you shall extend this same protection to me, Master Boivin, for one day, at least – nay, my good friend, there's no use in sulking about it. A certain friend of ours, whose name I need not speak aloud, is little in the habit of being denied anything; are you prepared for the consequence of disobeying his orders?'

'Let me see that they are his orders,' said he sturdily – 'who tells me that such is his will?'

'I do,' was my brief reply, as, with a look of consummate effrontery, I drew myself up and stared him insolently in the face.

'Suppose, then, that I have my doubts on the matter – suppose –'

'I will suppose all you wish, Boivin,' said I interrupting, 'and even something more; for I will suppose myself returning to the quarter whence I have just come, and within one hour – ay, within one hour, Boivin – bringing back with me a written order, not to pass me into the Temple, but to receive the body of the Citizen Jean Baptiste Boivin, and be accountable for the same to the Committee of Public Safety.'

He trembled from head to foot as I said these words, and in his

shaking cheeks and fallen jaw I saw that my spell was working.

‘And now, I ask for the last time, do you consent or not?’

‘How is it to be done?’ cried he, in a voice of downright wretchedness. ‘You are not “inscribed” at the secretaries’ office as one of the “rats.”’

‘I should hope not,’ said I, cutting him short; ‘but I may take the place of one for an hour or so. Tristan is about my own size; his blouse and badge will just suit me.’

‘Ay, leave me to a fine of a thousand francs, if you should be found out,’ muttered Boivin, ‘not to speak of a worse mayhap.’

‘Exactly so – far worse in case of your refusing; but there sounds the bell for mustering the prisoners – it is now too late.’

‘Not so – not so,’ cried Boivin, eagerly, as he saw me prepared to leave the house. ‘You shall go in Tristan’s place. Send him here, that he may tell you everything about the “service,” and give you his blouse and badge.’

I was not slow in availing myself of the permission, nor was Tristan sorry to find a substitute. He was a dull, depressed-looking boy, not over communicative as to his functions, merely telling me that I was to follow the others – that I came fourth in the line – to answer when my name was called ‘Tristan,’ and to put the money I received in my leathern pocket, without uttering a word, lest the gaolers should notice it.

To accoutre myself in the white cotton nightcap and the blouse of the craft was the work of a few seconds; and then, with a great knife in my girdle, and a capacious pocket slung at my side, I

looked every inch a 'Marmiton.'

In the kitchen the bustle had already begun, and half-a-dozen cooks, with as many under-cooks, were dealing out 'portions' with all the speed of a well-practised performance. Nothing short of great habit could have prevented the confusion degenerating into downright anarchy. The 'service' was, indeed, effected with a wonderful rapidity; and certain phrases, uttered with speed, showed how it progressed. 'Maigre des Curés,' – 'finished.' 'Bouillon for the "expectants,"' – 'ready here.' 'Canards aux olives des condamnées,' – 'all served.' 'Red partridges for the reprieved at the upper table,' – 'despatched.' Such were the quick demands, and no less quick replies, that rung out, amidst the crash of plates, knives, and glasses, and the incessant movement of feet, until, at last, we were all marshalled in a long line, and, preceded by a drum, set out for the prison.

As we drew near, the heavy gates opened to receive, and closed behind us with a loud bang that I could not help feeling must have smote heavily on many a heart that had passed there. We were now in a large courtyard, where several doors led off, each guarded by a sentinel, whose ragged clothes and rusty accoutrements proclaimed a true soldier of the Republic. One of the large hurdles used for carrying the prisoners to the Place stood in one corner, and two or three workmen were busied in repairing it for the coming occasion.

So much I had time to observe, as we passed along; and now we entered a dimly lighted corridor of great extent; passing down

which, we emerged into a second *cour*, traversed by a species of canal or river, over which a bridge led. In the middle of this was a strongly barred iron gate, guarded by two sentries. As we arrived here, our names were called aloud by a species of turnkey; and at the call 'Tristan,' I advanced, and, removing the covers from the different dishes, submitted them for inspection to an old, savage-looking fellow, who, with a long steel fork, pricked the pieces of meat, as though anything could have been concealed within them. Meanwhile, another fellow examined my cotton cap and pocket, and passed his hands along my arms and body. The whole did not last more than a few minutes, and the word 'forward' was given to pass on. The gloom of the place – the silence, only broken by the heavy bang of an iron-barred door, or the clank of chains, the sad thoughts of the many who trod these corridors on their way to death – depressed me greatly, and equally unprepared me for what was to come; for as we drew near the great hall, the busy hum of voices, the sound of laughter, and the noises of a large assembly in full converse, suddenly burst upon the ear; and as the wide doors were thrown open, I beheld above a hundred people, who, either gathered in single groups, or walking up and down in parties, seemed all in the fullest enjoyment of social intercourse.

A great table, with here and there a large flagon of water, or a huge loaf of the coarse bread used by the peasantry, ran from end to end of the chamber. A few had already taken their places at this, but some were satisfied with laying a cap or a kerchief on the bench opposite their accustomed seat; while others again

had retired into windows and corners, as if to escape the general gaze, and partake of their humble meal in solitude.

Whatever restrictions prison discipline might have exercised elsewhere, here the widest liberty seemed to prevail. The talk was loud, and even boisterous; the manner to the turnkeys exhibited nothing of fear: the whole assemblage presented rather the aspect of a gathering of riotous republicans than of a band of prisoners under sentence. And yet such were the greater number, and the terrible slip of paper attached to the back of each, with a date, told the day on which he was to die.

As I lingered to gaze on this strange gathering, I was admonished to move on, and now perceived that my companion had advanced to the end of the hall, by which a small flight of stone steps led out upon a terrace – at the end of which we entered another and not less spacious chamber, equally crowded and noisy. Here the company were of both sexes, and of every grade and condition of rank – from the highest noble of the former Court, to the humblest peasant of La Vendee. If the sounds of mirth and levity were less frequent, the buzz of conversation was, to the full, as loud as in the lower hall, where, from difference of condition in life, the scenes passing presented stranger and more curious contrasts. In one corner a group of peasants were gathered around a white-haired priest, who, in a low but earnest voice, was uttering his last exhortation to them; in another, some young and fashionably dressed men were exhibiting to a party of ladies the very airs and graces by which they would have adorned

a saloon; here, was a party at piquet – there, a little group, arranging, for the last time, their household cares, and settling, with a few small coins, the account of mutual expenditure. Of the ladies, several were engaged at needlework – some little preparation for the morrow – the last demand that ever vanity was to make of them!

Although there was matter of curiosity in all around me, my eyes sought for hut one object, the curé of St. Blois. Twice or thrice, from the similarity of dress, I was deceived, and, at last, when I really did behold him, as he sat alone in a window, reading, I could scarcely satisfy myself of the reality, he was lividly pale, his eyes deep sunk, and surrounded with two dark circles, while along his worn cheek the tears had marked two channels of purple colour. What need of the guillotine there – the lamp of life was in its last flicker without it.

Our names were called, and the meats placed upon the table. Just as the head-turnkey was about to give the order to be seated, a loud commotion, and a terrible uproar in the court beneath, drew every one to the window. It was a hurdle which, emerging from an archway, broke down from overcrowding; and now the confusion of prisoners, gaolers, and sentries, with plunging horses and screaming sufferers, made a scene of the wildest uproar. Chained two by two, the prisoners were almost helpless, and in their efforts to escape injury made the most terrific struggle. Such were the instincts of life in those on the very road to death!

Resolving to profit by the moment of confusion, I hastened to the window, where alone, unmoved by the general commotion, sat the Père Michel. He lifted his glassy eyes as I came near, and in a low, mild voice said —

‘Thanks, my good boy, but I have no money to pay thee; nor does it matter much now – it is but another day.

I could have cried as I heard these sad words; but mastering emotions which would have lost time so precious, I drew close, and whispered —

‘Père Michel, it is I, your own Maurice.’

He started, and a deep flush suffused his cheek; and then stretching out his hand, he pushed back my cap, and parted the hair of my forehead, as if doubting the reality of what he saw; when with a weak voice he said —

‘No, no, thou art not my own Maurice. His eyes shone not with that worldly lustre – thine do; his brow was calm, and fair as children’s should be – thine is marked with manhood’s craft and subtlety; and yet, thou art like him.’

A low sob broke from me as I listened to his words, and the tears gushed forth, and rolled in torrents down my cheeks.

‘Yes,’ cried he, clasping me in his arms, ‘thou art my own dear boy. I know thee now; but how art thou here, and thus?’ and he touched my blouse as he spoke.

‘I came to see and to save you, père,’ said I. ‘Nay, do not try to discourage me, but rather give me all your aid. I saw her – I was with her in her last moments at the guillotine; she gave me a

message for you, but this you shall never hear till we are without these walls.'

'It cannot be, it cannot be,' said he sorrowfully.

'It can and shall be,' said I resolutely. 'I have merely assumed this dress for the occasion; I have friends, powerful and willing to protect me. Let us change robes – give me that "soutane," and put on the blouse. When you leave this, hasten to the old garden of the chapel, and wait for my coming – I will join you there before night.'

'It cannot be,' replied he again.

'Again I say, it shall, and must be. Nay, if you still refuse, there shall be two victims, for I will tear off the dress here where I stand, and openly declare myself the son of the Royalist Tiernay.'

Already the commotion in the court beneath was beginning to subside, and even now the turnkeys' voices were heard in the refectory, recalling the prisoners to table – another moment and it would have been too late: it was, then, less by persuasion than by actual force I compelled him to yield, and, pulling off his black serge gown, drew over his shoulders my yellow blouse, and placed upon his head the white cap of the 'Marmiton.' The look of shame and sorrow of the poor curé would have betrayed him at once, if any had given themselves the trouble to look at him.

'And thou, my poor child,' said he, as he saw me array myself in his priestly dress, 'what is to be thy fate?'

'All will depend upon you, Père Michel,' said I, holding him by the arm, and trying to fix his wandering attention. 'Once out of

the prison, write to Boivin, the restaurateur of the “Scélérat,” and tell him that an escaped convict has scruples for the danger into which he has brought a poor boy, one of his “Marmitons,” and whom by a noxious drug he has lulled into insensibility, while, having exchanged clothes, he has managed his escape. Boivin will comprehend the danger he himself runs by leaving me here. All will go well – and now there’s not a moment to lose. Take up your basket, and follow the others.’

‘But the falsehood of all this,’ cried the père.

‘But your life, and mine, too, lost, if you refuse,’ said I, pushing him away.

‘Oh, Maurice, how changed have you become!’ cried he sorrowfully.

‘You will see a greater change in me yet, as I lie in the sawdust beneath the scaffold,’ said I hastily. ‘Go, go.’

There was, indeed, no more time to lose. The muster of the prisoners was forming at one end of the chamber, while the ‘Marmitons’ were gathering up their plates and dishes, previous to departure, at the other; and it was only by the decisive step of laying myself down within the recesses of the window, in the attitude of one overcome by sleep, that I could force him to obey my direction. I could feel his presence as he bent over me, and muttered something that must have been a prayer. I could know, without seeing, that he still lingered near me, but as I never stirred, he seemed to feel that my resolve was not to be shaken, and at last he moved slowly away.

At first the noise and clamour sounded like the crash of some desperate conflict, but by degrees this subsided, and I could hear the names called aloud and the responses of the prisoners, as they were 'told off' in parties from the different parts of the prison. Tender leave-takings and affectionate farewells from many who never expected to meet again, accompanied these, and the low sobs of anguish were mingled with the terrible chaos of voices; and at last I heard the name of 'Michel Delannois': I felt as if my death-summons was in the words 'Michel Delannois,'

'That crazy priest can neither hear nor see, I believe,' said the gaoler savagely. 'Will no one answer for him?'

'He is asleep yonder in the window,' replied a voice from the crowd.

'Let him sleep then,' said the turnkey; 'when awake he gives us no peace with his prayers and exhortations.'

'He has eaten nothing for three days,' observed another; 'he is, perhaps, overcome by weakness more than by sleep.'

'Be it so! if he only lie quiet, I care not,' rejoined the gaoler, and proceeded to the next name on the list.

The monotonous roll-call, the heat, the attitude in which I was lying, all conspired to make me drowsy: even the very press of sensations that crowded to my brain lent their aid, and at last I slept as soundly as ever I had done in my bed at night. I was dreaming of the dark alleys in the wood of Belleville, where so often I had strolled of an evening with Père Michel: I was fancying that we were gathering the fresh violets beneath the old

trees, when a rude hand shook my shoulder, and I awoke. One of the turnkeys and Boivin stood over me, and I saw at once that my plan had worked well.

‘Is this the fellow?’ said the turnkey, pushing me rudely with his foot.

‘Yes,’ replied Boivin, white with fear; ‘this is the boy; his name is Tristan.’ The latter words were accompanied with a look of great significance towards me.

‘What care we how he is called! let us hear in what manner he came here.’

‘I can tell you little,’ said I, staring and looking wildly around; ‘I must have been asleep, and dreaming, too.’

‘The letter,’ whispered Boivin to the turnkey – ‘the letter says that he was made to inhale some poisonous drug, and that while insensible – ’

‘Bah,’ said the other derisively, ‘this will not gain credit here; there has been complicity in the affair, Master Boivin. The commissaire is not the man to believe a trumped-up tale of the sort; besides, you are well aware that you are responsible for these “rats” of yours. It is a private arrangement between you and the commissaire, and it is not very probable that he’ll get himself into a scrape for you.’

‘Then what are we to do?’ cried Boivin passionately, as he wrung his hands in despair.

‘I know what I should, in a like case,’ was the dry reply.

‘And that is? – ’

‘*Laisser aller!*’ was the curt rejoinder. ‘The young rogue has passed for a curé for the last afternoon; I’d even let him keep up the disguise a little longer, and it will be all the same by this time to-morrow.’

‘You’d send me to the guillotine for another?’ said I boldly, ‘thanks for the good intention, my friend; but Boivin knows better than to follow your counsel. Hear me one moment,’ said I, addressing the latter, and drawing him to one side – ‘if you don’t liberate me within a quarter of an hour, I’ll denounce you and yours to the commissary. I know well enough what goes on at the “Scélérat,” – you understand me well. If a priest has really made his escape from the prison, you are not clean-handed enough to meet the accusation; see to it then, Boivin, that I may be free at once.’

‘Imp of Satan,’ exclaimed Boivin, grinding his teeth, ‘I have never enjoyed ease or quietness since the first hour I saw you.’

‘It may cost a couple of thousand francs, Boivin,’ said I calmly; ‘but what then? Better that than take your seat along with us to-morrow in the *Charrette Rouge*.’

‘Maybe he’s right, after all,’ muttered the turnkey in a half-whisper; ‘speak to the commissary.’

‘Yes,’ said I, affecting an air of great innocence and simplicity – ‘tell him that a poor orphan boy, without friends or home, claims his pity.’

‘*Scélérat infâme!*’ cried Boivin, as he shook his fist at me, and then followed the turnkey to the commissary’s apartment.

In less time than I could have believed possible, Boivin returned with one of the upper gaolers, and told me, in a few dry words, that I was free. 'But, mark me,' added he, 'we part here – come what may, you never shall plant foot within my doors again.'

'Agreed,' said I gaily; 'the world has other dupes as easy to play upon, and I was getting well nigh weary of you.'

'Listen to the scoundrel!' muttered Boivin; 'what will he say next?'

'Simply this,' rejoined I – 'that as these are not becoming garments for me to wear – for I'm neither *père* nor *frère* – I must have others ere I quit this.'

If the insolence of my demand occasioned some surprise at first, a little cool persistence on my part showed that compliance would be the better policy; and, after conferring together for a few minutes, during which I heard the sound of money, the turnkey retired, and came back speedily with a jacket and cap belonging to one of the drummers of the Republican Guard – a gaudy, tasteless affair enough, but, as a disguise, nothing could have been more perfect.

'Have you not a drum to give him?' said Boivin, with a most malignant sneer at my equipment.

'He 'll make a noise in the world without that,' muttered the gaoler, half soliloquising; and the words fell upon my heart with a strange significance.

'Your blessing, Boivin,' said I, 'and we part.' '*Le te-*'

‘No, no; don’t curse the boy,’ interposed the gaoler good-humouredly.

‘Then, move off, youngster; I’ve lost too much time with you already.’

The next moment I was in the Place; a light misty rain was falling, and the night was dark and starless. The ‘Scélérat’ was brilliant with lamps and candles, and crowds were passing in and out; but it was no longer a home for me, so I passed on, and continued my way towards the Boulevard.

CHAPTER IV. 'THE NIGHT OF THE NINTH THERMIDOR'

I had agreed with the Père Michel to rendezvous at the garden of the little chapel of St. Blois, and thitherward I now turned my steps.

The success which followed this my first enterprise in life had already worked a wondrous change in all my feelings. Instead of looking up to the poor curé for advice and guidance, I felt as though our parts were exchanged, and that it was I who was now the protector of the other. The oft-repeated sneers at *les bons Prêtres*, who were good for nothing, must have had a share in this new estimate of my friend, but a certain self-reliance just then springing up in my heart effectually completed the change.

The period was essentially one of action and not of reflection. Events seemed to fashion themselves at the will of him who had daring and courage to confront them, and they alone appeared weak and poor-spirited who would not stem the tide of fortune. Sentiments like these were not, as may be supposed, best calculated to elevate the worthy père in my esteem, and I already began to feel how unsuited was such companionship for me, whose secret promptings whispered ever, 'Go forward.'

The very vagueness of my hopes served but to extend the horizon of futurity before me, and I fancied a thousand

situations of distinction that might yet be mine. Fame – or its poor counterfeit, notoriety – seemed the most enviable of all possessions. It mattered little by what merits it was won, for, in that fickle mood of popular opinion, great vices were as highly prized as transcendent abilities, and one might be as illustrious by crime as by genius. Such were not the teachings of the père; but they were the lessons that Paris dinned into my ears unceasingly. Reputation, character, was of no avail, in a social condition where all was change and vacillation. What was idolised one day was execrated the next day. The hero of yesterday was the object of popular vengeance to-day. The success of the passing hour was everything.

The streets were crowded as I passed along; although a drizzling rain was falling, groups and knots of people were gathered together at every corner, and, by their eager looks and gestures, showed that some event of great moment had occurred. I stopped to ask what it meant, and learned that Robespierre had been denounced in the Assembly, and that his followers were hastening, in arms, to the Place de Grève. As yet, men spoke in whispers, or broken phrases. Many were seen affectionately embracing and clasping each other's hands in passionate emotion; but few dared to trust themselves to words, for none knew if the peril were really passed, or if the power of the tyrant might not become greater than ever. While I yet listened to the tidings, which, in half-sentences and broken words, reached my ears, the roll of drums, beating the *générale*,

was heard, and suddenly the head of a column appeared, carrying torches, and seated upon ammunition-waggon and caissons, and chanting in wild chorus the words of the 'Marseillaise.' On they came, a terrible host of half-naked wretches, their heads bound in handkerchiefs, and their brawny arms bare to the shoulders.

The artillery of the Municipale followed, many of the magistrates riding amongst them dressed in the tricoloured scarfs of officers. As the procession advanced, the crowds receded, and gradually the streets were left free to the armed force.

While, terror-struck, I continued to gaze at the countenances over which the lurid torchlight cast a horrid glare, a strong hand grasped my collar, and by a jerk swung me up to a seat on one of the caissons; and at the same time a deep voice said, 'Come, youngster, this is more in thy way than mine,' and a black-bearded *sapeur* pushed a drum before me, and ordered me to beat the *générale*. Such was the din and uproar that my performance did not belie my uniform, and I beat away manfully, scarcely sorry, amid all my fears, at the elevated position from which I now surveyed the exciting scene around me.

As we passed, the shops were closed on either side in haste, and across the windows of the upper storeys beds and mattresses were speedily drawn, in preparation for the state of siege now so imminent. Lights flickered from room to room, and all betokened a degree of alarm and terror. Louder and louder pealed the 'Marseillaise,' as the columns deployed into the open Place, from which every street and lane now poured its crowds

of armed men. The line was now formed by the artillery, which, to the number of sixteen pieces, ranged from end to end of the square, the dense crowd of horse and foot forming behind, the mass dimly lighted by the waving torches that here and there marked the presence of an officer. Gradually the sounds of the 'Marseillaise' grew fainter and fainter, and soon a dreary silence pervaded that varied host, more terrible now, as they stood speechless, than in all the tumultuous din of the wildest uproar. Meanwhile, from the streets which opened into the Place at the farthest ends, the columns of the National Guard began to move up, the leading files carrying torches; behind them came ten pieces of artillery, which, as they issued, were speedily placed in battery, and flanked by the heavy dragoons of the Guard; and now, in breathless silence, the two forces stood regarding each other, the cannoniers with lighted matches in their hands, the dragoons firmly clasping their sabres – all but waiting for the word to plunge into the deadliest strife. It was a terrible moment – the slightest stir in the ranks – the rattling of a horse's panoply – the clank of a sabre – fell upon the heart like the toll of a death-bell. It was then that two or three horsemen were seen to advance from the troops of the Convention, and, approaching the others, were speedily lost among their ranks. A low and indistinct murmur ran along the lines, which each moment grew louder, till at last it burst forth into a cry of '*Vive la Convention!*' Quitting their ranks, the men gathered around a general of the National Guard, who addressed them in words of passionate eloquence,

but of which I was too distant to hear anything. Suddenly the ranks began to thin; some were seen to pile their arms, and move away in silence; others marched across the Place, and took up their position beside the troops of the National Guard; of the cannoniers, many threw down their matches, and extinguished the flame with their feet, while others again, limbering up their guns, slowly retired to the barracks.

As for myself, too much interested in the scene to remember that I was, in some sort, an actor in it, I sat upon the caisson, watching all that went forward so eagerly, that I never noticed the departure of my companions, nor perceived that I was left by myself. I know not how much later this discovery might have been deferred to me had not an officer of the Guard ridden up to where I was, and said, 'Move up, move up, my lad; keep close to the battery.' He pointed at the same time with his sabre in the direction where a number of guns and carriages were already proceeding.

Not a little flattered by the order, I gathered up reins and whip, and, thanks to the good drilling of the beasts, who readily took their proper places, soon found myself in the line, which now drew up in the rear of the artillery of the Guard, separated from the front by a great mass of horse and foot. I knew nothing of what went forward in the Place; from what I gathered, however, I could learn that the artillery was in position, the matches burning, and everything in readiness for a cannonade. Thus we remained for above an hour, when the order was given to march. Little

knew I that, in that brief interval, the whole fortunes of France – ay, of humanity itself – had undergone a mighty change – that the terrible reign of blood, the tyranny of Robespierre, had closed, and that he who had sent so many to the scaffold now lay bleeding and mutilated upon the very table where he had signed the death-warrants.

The day was just beginning to dawn as we entered the barracks of the Conciergerie, and drew up in a double line along its spacious square. The men dismounted, and stood ‘at ease,’ awaiting the arrival of the staff of the National Guard, which, it was said, was coming; and now the thought occurred to me of what I should best do, whether make my escape while it was yet time, or remain to see by what accident I had come there. If a sense of duty to the Père Michel urged me on one side, the glimmering hope of some opening to fortune swayed me on the other. I tried to persuade myself that my fate was bound up with his, and that he should be my guide through the wild waste before me; but these convictions could not stand against the very scene in which I stood. The glorious panoply of war – the harnessed team – the helmeted dragoon – the proud steed in all the trappings of battle! How faint were the pleadings of duty against such arguments! The père, too, designed me for a priest. The life of a seminarist in a convent was to be mine! I was to wear the red gown and the white cape of an acolyte! – to be taught how to swing a censer, or snuff the candles of the high altar – to be a train-bearer in a procession, or carry a relic in a glass-case!

The hoarse bray of a trumpet that then rung through the court routed these ignoble fancies, and as the staff rode proudly in, my resolve was taken. I was determined to be a soldier.

The day, I have said, was just breaking, and the officers wore their dark-grey capotes over their uniforms. One, however, had his coat partly open, and I could see the blue and silver beneath, which, tarnished and worn as it was, had to my eyes all the brilliancy of a splendid uniform. He was an old man, and by his position in advance of the others showed that he was the chief of the staff. This was General Lacoste, at that time *en mission* from the army of the Rhine, and now sent by the Convention to report upon the state of events among the troops. Slowly passing along the line, the old general halted before each gun, pointing out to his staff certain minutiae, which, from his gestures and manner, it was easy to see were not the subject of eulogy. Many of the pieces were ill slung, and badly balanced on the trucks; the wheels, in some cases, were carelessly put on, their tires worn, and the iron shoeing defective. The harnessing, too, was patched and mended in a slovenly fashion; the horses lean and out of condition; the drivers awkward and inexperienced.

‘This is all bad, gentlemen,’ said he, addressing the officers, but in a tone to be easily heard all around him, ‘and reflects but little credit upon the state of your discipline in the capital. We have been now seventeen months in the field before the enemy, and not idle either; and yet I would take shame to myself if the worst battery in our artillery were not better equipped, better

horsed, better driven, and better served, than any I see here.'

One who seemed a superior officer here appeared to interpose some explanation or excuse, but the general would not listen to him, and continued his way along the line – passing around which he now entered the space between the guns and the caissons. At last he stopped directly in front of where I was, and fixed his dark and penetrating eyes steadily on me. Such was their fascination that I could not look from him, but continued to stare as fixedly at him.

'Look here, for instance,' cried he, as he pointed to me with his sword, 'is that *gamin* yonder like an artillery-driver? or is it to a drummer-boy you intrust the caisson of an eight-pounder gun? Dismount, sirrah, and come hither,' cried he to me, in a voice that sounded like an order for instant execution. 'This popinjay dress of yours must have been the fancy of some worthy shopkeeper of the 'Quai Lepelletier'; it never could belong to any regular corps. Who are you?'

'Maurice Tiernay, sir,' said I, bringing my hand to my cap in military salute.

'Maurice Tiernay,' repeated he, slowly, after me. 'And have you no more to say for yourself than your name?'

'Very little, sir,' said I, taking courage from the difficulty in which I found myself.

'What of your father, boy? – is he a soldier?'

'He was, sir,' replied I, with firmness.

'Then he is dead? In what corps did he serve?'

‘In the Garde du Corps,’ said I proudly.

The old general gave a short cough, and seemed to search for his snuff-box to cover his confusion; the next moment, however, he had regained his self-possession, and continued: ‘And since that event – I mean since you lost your father – what have you been doing? How have you supported yourself?’

‘In various ways, sir, said I, with a shrug of the shoulders, to imply that the answer was too tedious to listen to. ‘I have studied to be a priest, and I have served as a “rat” in the Prison du Temple.’

‘You have certainly tried the extremes of life,’ said he, laughing; ‘and now you wish, probably, to hit the *juste milieu*, by becoming a soldier?’

‘Even so, sir,’ said I easily. ‘It was a mere accident that mounted me upon this caisson, but I am quite ready to believe that Fortune intended me kindly when she did so.’

‘These *gredins* fancy that they are all born to be generals of France, said the old man, laughing; ‘but, after all, it is a harmless delusion, and easily curable by a campaign or two. Come, sirrah, I’ll find out a place for you, where, if you cannot serve the Republic better, you will, at least, do her less injury than as a driver in her artillery. Bertholet, let him be enrolled in your detachment of the gendarme, and give him my address – I wish to speak to him to-morrow.’

‘At what hour, general?’ said I promptly.

‘At eight, or half-past – after breakfast,’ replied he.

‘It may easily be before mine,’ muttered I to myself.

‘What says he?’ cried the general sharply.

The aide-de-camp whispered a few words in answer, at which the other smiled, and said, ‘Let him come somewhat earlier – say eight o’clock.’

‘You hear that, boy?’ said the aide-de-camp to me, while with a slight gesture he intimated that I might retire. Then, as if suddenly remembering that he had not given me the address of the general, he took a scrap of crumpled paper from his pocket-book, and wrote a few words hastily on it with his pencil. ‘There,’ cried he, throwing it towards me, ‘there is your billet for this day, at least.’ I caught the scrap of paper, and, after deciphering the words, perceived that they were written on the back of an assignat for forty sous.

It was a large sum to one who had not wherewithal to buy a morsel of bread; and as I looked at it over and over, I fancied there would be no end to the pleasures such wealth could purchase. I can breakfast on the Quai Voltaire, thought I – ay, and sumptuously too, with coffee and chestnuts, and a slice of melon, and another of cheese, and a *petite goutte* to finish, for five sous. The panther, at the corner of the Pont Neuf, costs but a sou; and for three one can see the brown bear of America, the hyæna, and another beast whose name I forget, but whose image, as he is represented outside, carrying off a man in his teeth, I shall retain to my last hour. Then there is the panorama of Dunkirk, at the Rue Chopart, with the Duke of York begging his life from a

terrible-looking soldier in a red cap and a tricoloured scarf. After that, there's the parade at the 'Carrousel'; and mayhap something more solemn still at the 'Grève'; but there was no limit to the throng of enjoyments which came rushing to my imagination, and it was in a kind of ecstasy of delight I set forth on my voyage of pleasure.

CHAPTER V. THE CHOICE OF A LIFE

In looking back, after a long lapse of years, I cannot refrain from a feeling of astonishment to think how little remembrance I possess of the occurrences of that day – one of the most memorable that ever dawned for France – the eventful 29th of July, that closed the reign of terror by the death of the tyrant! It is true, that all Paris was astir at daybreak; that a sense of national vengeance seemed to pervade the vast masses that filled the streets, which now were scenes of the most exciting emotion. I can only account for the strange indifference that I felt about these stirring themes by the frequency with which similar, or what to me at least appeared similar, scenes had already passed before my eyes.

One of the most remarkable phases of the revolution was the change it produced in all the social relations by substituting an assumed nationality for the closer and dearer ties of kindred and affection. France was everything – the family nothing; every generous wish, every proud thought, every high ambition or noble endeavour, belonged to the country. In this way, whatever patriotism may have gained, certainly all the home affections were utterly wrecked; the humble and unobtrusive virtues of domestic life seemed mean and insignificant beside the grand

displays of patriotic devotion which each day exhibited.

Hence grew the taste for that 'life of the streets' then so popular – everything should be en *évidence*. All the emotions which delicacy would render sacred to the seclusion of home were now to be paraded to the noonday. Fathers were reconciled to rebellious children before the eyes of multitudes; wives received forgiveness from their husbands in the midst of approving crowds; leave-takings the most affecting; partings, for those never to meet again; the last utterings of the death-bed; the faint whispers of expiring affection; the imprecations of undying hate – all, all were exhibited in public, and the gaze of the low, the vulgar, and the debauched associated with the most agonising griefs that ever the heart endured. The scenes, which now are shrouded in all the secrecy of domestic privacy, were then the daily life of Paris; and to this cause alone can I attribute the hardened indifference with which events the most terrible and heart-rending were witnessed. Bred up amidst such examples, I saw little matter for emotion in scenes of harrowing interest. An air of mockery was on everything, and a bastard classicality destroyed every semblance of truth in whatever would have been touching and affecting.

The commotion of Paris on that memorable morning was, then, to my thinking, little more than usual. If the crowds who pressed their way to the Place de la Revolution were greater – if the cries of vengeance were in louder utterance – if the imprecations were deeper and more terrible – the ready answer

that satisfied all curiosity was – it was Robespierre who was on his way to be executed. Little knew I what hung upon that life! and how the fate of millions depended upon the blood that morning was to shed! Too full of myself and my own projects, I disengaged myself from the crowds that pressed eagerly towards the Tuileries, and took my way by less-frequented streets in the direction of the Boulevard Mont Parnasse.

I wished, if possible, to see the père once more, to take a last farewell of him, and ask his blessing, too; for still a lingering faith in the lessons he had taught me continued to haunt my mind amidst all the evil influences with which my wayward life surrounded me. The further I went from the quarter of the Tuileries, the more deserted and solitary grew the streets. Not a carriage or horseman was to be seen – scarcely a foot-passenger. All Paris had, apparently, assembled on the Place de la Révolution; and the very beggars had quitted their accustomed haunts to repair thither. Even the distant hum of the vast multitude faded away, and it was only as the wind bore them that I could catch the sounds of the hoarse cries that bespoke a people's vengeance. And now I found myself in the little silent street which once had been my home. I stood opposite the house where we used to live, afraid to enter it lest I might compromise the safety of her I wished to save, and yet longing once more to see the little chamber where we once sat together – the chimney-corner where, in the dark nights of winter, I nestled, with my hymn-book, and tried to learn the rhymes that every plash of the

falling hail against the windows routed – to lie down once more in the little bed, where so often I had passed whole nights of happy imaginings – bright thoughts of a peaceful future that were never to be realised!

Half choking with my emotion, I passed on, and soon saw the green fields, and the windmill-covered hill of Montmartre rising above the embankment of the Boulevards – and now the ivy-clothed wall of the garden, within which stood the chapel of St. Blois. The gate lay ajar as of old, and, pushing it open, I entered. Everything was exactly as I had left it – the same desolation and desertion everywhere – so much so, that I almost fancied no human foot had crossed its dreary precincts since last I was there. On drawing nigh to the chapel, I found the door fast barred and barricaded as before; but a window lay open, and on examining it closer I discovered the marks of a recent foot-track on the ground and the window-sill. Could the Père Michel have been there? was the question that at once occurred to my mind. Had the poor priest come to take a last look and a farewell of a spot so dear to him? It could scarcely have been any other. There was nothing to tempt cupidity in that humble little church; an image of the ‘Virgin and Child’ in wax was the only ornament of the altar. No, no; pillage had never been the motive of him who entered here.

Thus reasoning, I climbed up to the window, and entered the chapel. As my footsteps echoed through the silent building, I felt that sense of awe and reverence so inseparably connected with a place of worship, and which is ever more impressive still

as we stand in it alone. The present, however, was less before me than the past, of which everything reminded me. There was the seat the marquise used to sit in – there the footstool I had so often placed at her feet. How different was the last service I had rendered her! There the pillar, beside which I have stood spell-bound, gazing at that fair face, whose beauty arrested the thoughts that should have wended heavenward, and made my muttered prayers like offerings to herself. The very bouquet of flowers some pious hand had placed beneath the shrine – withered and faded – was there still. But where were they whose beating hearts had throbbed with deep devotion? How many had died upon the scaffold! – how many were still lingering in imprisonment, some in exile, some in concealment, dragging out lives of misery and anxiety! What was the sustaining spirit of such martyrdom? I asked myself again and again. Was it the zeal of true religion, or was it the energy of loyalty that bore them up against every danger, and enabled them to brave death itself with firmness? – and if this faith of theirs was thus ennobling, why could not France be of one mind and heart? There came no answer to these doubts of mine, and I slowly advanced towards the altar, still deeply buried in thought. What was my surprise to see that two candles stood there, which bore signs of having been recently lighted. At once the whole truth flashed across me – the père had been there; he had come to celebrate a mass – the last, perhaps, he was ever to offer up at that altar. I knew with what warm affection he loved every object and every spot endeared

to him by long time, and I fancied to myself the overflowing of his heart as he entered once more, and for the last time, the little temple, associated with all the joys and sorrows of his existence. Doubtless, too, he had waited anxiously for my coming; mayhap in the prayers he offered I was not forgotten. I thought of him kneeling there, in the silence of the night, alone, as he was, his gentle voice the only sound in the stillness of the hour, his pure heart throbbing with gratitude for his deliverance, and prayerful hopes for those who had been his persecutors. I thought over all this, and, in a torrent of emotions, I knelt down before the altar to pray. I know not what words I uttered, but his name must somehow have escaped my lips, for suddenly a door opened beside the altar, and the Père Michel, dressed in his full vestments, stood before me. His features, wan and wasted as they were, had regained their wonted expression of calm dignity, and by his look I saw that he would not suffer the sacred spot to be profaned by any outburst of feeling on either side.

‘Those dreadful shouts tell of another massacre,’ said he solemnly, as the wind bore towards us the deafening cries of the angry multitude. ‘Let us pray for the souls’ rest of the departed.’

‘Then will your prayers be offered for Robespierre, for Couthon, and St. Just,’ said I boldly.

‘And who are they who need more the saints’ intercession – who have ever been called to judgment with such crimes to expiate – who have ever so widowed France, and so desecrated her altars? Happily, a few yet remain where piety may kneel to

implore pardon for their iniquity. Let us recite the Litany for the Dead,' said he solemnly, and at once began the impressive service.

As I knelt beside the rails of the altar, and heard the prayers which, with deep devotion, he uttered, I could not help feeling the contrast between that touching evidence of Christian charity and the tumultuous joy of the populace, whose frantic bursts of triumph were borne on the air.

'And now come with me, Maurice,' said he, as the Litany was concluded. 'Here, in this little sacristy, we are safe from all molestation; none will think of us on such a day as this.'

And as he spoke he drew his arm around me, and led me into the little chamber where once the precious vessels and the decorations of the church were kept.

'Here we are safe,' said he, as he drew me to his side on the oaken bench, which formed all the furniture of the room. 'To-morrow, Maurice, we must leave this, and seek an asylum in another land; but we are not friendless, my child – the brothers of the "Sacred Heart" will receive us. Their convent is in the wilds of the Ardennes, beyond the frontiers of France, and there, beloved by the faithful peasantry, they live in security and peace. We need not take the vows of their order, which is one of the strictest of all religious houses; but we may claim their hospitality and protection, and neither will be denied us. Think what a blessed existence will that be, Maurice, my son, to dwell under the same roof with these holy men, and to imbibe from them the peace of

mind that holiness alone bestows; to awake at the solemn notes of the pealing organ, and to sink to rest with the glorious liturgies still chanting around you; to feel an atmosphere of devotion on every side, and to see the sacred relics whose miracles have attested the true faith in ages long past. Does it not stir thy heart, my child, to know that such blessed privileges may be thine?"

I hung my head in silence, for, in truth, I felt nothing of the enthusiasm with which he sought to inspire me. The père quickly saw what passed in my mind, and endeavoured to depict the life of the monastery as a delicious existence, embellished by all the graces of literature, and adorned by the pleasures of intellectual converse. Poetry, romance, scenery, all were pressed into the service of his persuasions; but how weak were such arguments to one like me, the boy whose only education had been what the streets of Paris afforded – whose notions of eloquence were formed on the insane ravings of 'The Mountain,' and whose idea of greatness was centred in mere notoriety!

My dreamy look of inattention showed him again that he had failed; and I could see, in the increased pallor of his face, the quivering motion of his lip, the agitation the defeat was costing him.

'Alas! alas!' cried he passionately, 'the work of ruin is perfect; the mind of youth is corrupted, and the fountain of virtue denied at the very source. O Maurice, I had never thought this possible of thee, the child of my heart!'

A burst of grief here overcame him; for some minutes he

could not speak. At last he arose from his seat, and wiping off the tears that covered his cheeks with his robe, spoke, but in a voice whose full round tones contrasted strongly with his former weak accents.

‘The life I have pictured seems to thee ignoble and unworthy, boy. So did it not appear to Chrysostom, to Origen, and to Augustine – to the blessed saints of our Church, the eldest-born of Christianity. Be it so. Thine, mayhap, is not the age, nor this the era, in which to hope for better things. Thy heart yearns for heroic actions – thy spirit is set upon high ambitions – be it so. I say, never was the time more fitting for thee. The enemy is up; his armies are in the field; thousands and tens of thousands swell the ranks, already flushed with victory. Be a soldier, then. Ay, Maurice, buckle on the sword – the battlefield is before thee. Thou hast made choice to seek the enemy in the far-away countries of heathen darkness, or here in our own native France, where his camp is already spread. If danger be the lure that tempts thee – if to confront peril be thy wish – there is enough of it. Be a soldier, then, and gird thee for the great battle that is at hand. Ay, boy, if thou feelest within thee the proud darings that foreshadow success, speak the word, and thou shalt be a standard-bearer in the very van.’

I waited not for more; but springing up, I clasped my arms around his neck, and cried, in ecstasy, ‘Yes! Père Michel, you have guessed aright, my heart’s ambition is to be a soldier, and I want but your blessing to be a brave one.’

‘And thou shalt have it. A thousand blessings follow those who go forth to the good fight. But thou art yet young, Maurice – too young for this. Thou needest time, and much teaching, too. He who would brave the enemy before us, must be skilful as well as courageous. Thou art as yet but a child.’

‘The general said he liked boy-soldiers,’ said I promptly; ‘he told me so himself.’

‘What general – who told thee?’ cried the père, in trembling eagerness.

‘General Lacoste, the Chef d’État-major of the army of the Rhine; the same who gave me a rendezvous for to-morrow at his quarters.’

It was not till I had repeated my explanation again and again, nor, indeed, until I had recounted all the circumstances of my last night’s adventure, that the poor père could be brought to see his way through a mystery that had almost become equally embarrassing to myself. When he did, however, detect the clue, and when he had perceived the different tracks on which our minds were travelling, his grief burst all bounds. He inveighed against the armies of the Republic as hordes of pillagers and bandits, the sworn enemies of the Church, the desecrators of her altars. Their patriotism he called a mere pretence to shroud their infidelity. Their heroism was the bloodthirstiness of democratic cruelty. Seeing me still unmoved by all this passionate declamation, he adopted another tactic, and suddenly asked me if it were for such a cause as this my father had been

a soldier?

‘No!’ replied I firmly; ‘for when my father was alive, the soil of France had not been desecrated by the foot of the invader. The Austrian, the Prussian, the Englishman, had not yet dared to dictate the laws under which we were to live.’

He appeared thunderstruck at my reply, revealing, as it seemed to him, the extent of those teachings, whose corruptions he trembled at.

‘I knew it, I knew it!’ cried he bitterly, as he wrung his hands. ‘The seed of the iniquity is sown – the harvest-time will not be long in coming! And so, boy, thou hast spoken with one of these men – these generals, as they call themselves, of that republican horde?’

‘The officer who commands the artillery of the army of the Rhine may write himself general with little presumption,’ said I, almost angrily.

‘They who once led our armies to battle were the nobles of France – men whose proud station was the pledge for their chivalrous devotion. But why do I discuss the question with thee? He who deserts his faith may well forget that his birth was noble. Go, boy, join those with whom your heart is already linked. Your lesson will be an easy one – you have nothing to unlearn. The songs of the Girondins are already more grateful to your ear than our sacred canticles. Go, I say, since between us henceforth there can be no companionship.’

‘Will you not bless me, père,’ said I, approaching him in deep

humility; ‘will you not let me carry with me thy benediction?’

‘How shall I bless the arm that is lifted to wound the Holy Church? – how shall I pray for one whose place is in the ranks of the infidel? Hadst thou faith in my blessing, boy, thou hadst never implored it in such a cause. Renounce thy treason – and not alone my blessing, but thou shalt have a ‘Novena’ to celebrate thy fidelity. Be of us, Maurice, and thy name shall be honoured where honour is immortality.’

The look of beaming affection with which he uttered this, more than the words themselves, now shook my courage, and, in a conflict of doubt and indecision, I held down my head without speaking. What might have been my ultimate resolve, if left completely to myself, I know not; but at that very moment a detachment of soldiers marched past in the street without. They were setting off to join the army of the Rhine, and were singing in joyous chorus the celebrated song of the day, ‘Le chant du départ.’ The tramp of their feet – the clank of their weapons – their mellow voices – but, more than all, the associations that thronged to my mind, routed every other thought, and I darted from the spot, and never stopped till I reached the street.

A great crowd followed the detachment, composed partly of friends of the soldiers, partly of the idle loungers of the capital. Mixing with these, I moved onward, and speedily passed the outer boulevard and gained the open country.

CHAPTER VI. 'THE ARMY SIXTY YEARS SINCE'

I followed the soldiers as they marched beyond the outer boulevard and gained the open country. Many of the idlers dropped off here; others accompanied us a little farther; but at length, when the drums ceased to beat, and were slung in marching order on the backs of the drummers, when the men broke into the open order that French soldiers instinctively assume on a march, the curiosity of the gazers appeared to have nothing more to feed upon, and one by one they returned to the capital, leaving me the only lingerer.

To any one accustomed to military display, there was little to attract notice in the column, which consisted of detachments from various corps, horse, foot, and artillery; some were returning to their regiments after a furlough; some had just issued from the hospitals, and were seated in *charrettes*, or country cars; and others, again, were peasant boys only a few days before drawn in the conscription. There was every variety of uniform, and, I may add, of raggedness, too – a coarse blouse and a pair of worn shoes, with a red or blue handkerchief on the head, being the dress of many among them. The Republic was not rich in those days, and cared little for the costume in which her victories were won. The artillery alone seemed to preserve anything like

uniformity in dress. They wore a plain uniform of blue, with long white gaiters coming half-way up the thigh; a low cocked-hat, without feather, but with the tricoloured cockade in front. They were mostly men middle aged, or past the prime of life, bronzed, weather-beaten, hardy-looking fellows, whose white moustaches contrasted well with their sun-burned faces. All their weapons and equipments were of a superior kind, and showed the care bestowed upon an arm whose efficiency was the first discovery of the republican generals. The greater number of these were Bretons, and several of them had served in the fleet, still bearing in their looks and carriage something of that air which seems inherent in the seaman. They were grave, serious, and almost stern in manner, and very unlike the young cavalry soldiers, who, mostly recruited from the south of France, many of them Gascons, had all the high-hearted gaiety and reckless levity of their own peculiar land. A campaign to these fellows seemed a pleasant excursion; they made a jest of everything, from the wan faces of the invalids to the black bread of the commissary; they quizzed the new 'Tourlerous,' as the recruits were styled, and the old 'Grumblers,' as it was the fashion to call the veterans of the army; they passed their jokes on the Republic, and even their own officers came in for a share of their ridicule. The Grenadiers, however, were those who especially were made the subject of their sarcasm. They were generally from the north of France, and the frontier country toward Flanders, whence they probably imbibed a portion of that phlegm and moroseness so very unlike

the general gaiety of French nature; and when assailed by such adversaries, were perfectly incapable of reply or retaliation.

They all belonged to the army of the 'Sambre et Meuse,' which, although at the beginning of the campaign highly distinguished for its successes, had been latterly eclipsed by the extraordinary victories on the Upper Rhine and in Western Germany; and it was curious to hear with what intelligence and interest the greater questions of strategy were discussed by those who carried their packs as common soldiers in the ranks. Movements and manoeuvres were criticised, attacked, defended, ridiculed, and condemned, with a degree of acuteness and knowledge that showed the enormous progress the nation had made in military science, and with what ease the Republic could recruit her officers from the ranks of her soldiers.

At noon the column halted in the wood of Belleville; and while the men were resting, an express arrived announcing that a fresh body of troops would soon arrive, and ordering the others to delay their march till they came up. The orderly who brought the tidings could only say that he believed some hurried news had come from Germany, for before he left Paris the *rappel* was beating in different quarters, and the rumour ran that reinforcements were to set out for Strasbourg with the utmost despatch.

'And what troops are coming to join us?' said an old artillery sergeant, in evident disbelief of the tidings.

'Two batteries of artillery and the *voltigeurs* of the 4th, I know

for certain are coming,' said the orderly, 'and they spoke of a battalion of grenadiers.'

'What! do these Germans need another lesson?' said the cannonier. 'I thought Fleurus had taught them what our troops were made of.'

'How you talk of Fleurus!' interrupted a young hussar of the south. 'I have just come from the army of Italy, and, *ma foi!* we should never have mentioned such a battle as Fleurus in a despatch. Campaigning amongst dikes and hedges – fighting with a river on one flank and a fortress on t'other – parade manoeuvres – where, at the first check, the enemy retreats, and leaves you free, for the whole afternoon, to write off your successes to the Directory. Had you seen our fellows scaling the Alps, with avalanches of snow descending at every fire of the great guns – forcing pass after pass against an enemy, posted on every cliff and crag above us – cutting our way to victory by roads the hardiest hunter had seldom trod – I call that war.'

'And I call it the skirmish of an outpost!' said the gruff veteran, as he smoked away in thorough contempt for the enthusiasm of the other. 'I have served under Kléber, Hoche, and Moreau, and I believe they are the first generals of France.'

'There is a name greater than them all,' cried the hussar, with eagerness.

'Let us hear it, then – you mean Pichegru, perhaps, or Masséna?'

'No, I mean Bonaparte!' said the hussar triumphantly.

‘A good officer, and one of us,’ said the artilleryman, touching his belt to intimate the arm of the service the general belonged to. ‘He commanded the siege-train at Toulon.’

‘He belongs to all,’ said the other. ‘He is a dragoon, a voltigeur, an artillerist, a pontonnier – what you will – he knows everything, as I know my horse’s saddle, and cloak-bag.’

Both parties now grew warm; and as each was not only an eager partisan, but well acquainted with the leading events of the two campaigns they undertook to defend, the dispute attracted a large circle of listeners, who, either seated on the green sward, or lying at full length, formed a picturesque group under the shadow of the spreading oak-trees. Meanwhile, the cooking went speedily forward, and the camp-kettles smoked with a steam whose savoury odour was not a little tantalising to one who, like myself, felt that he did not belong to the company.

‘What’s thy mess, boy?’ said an old grenadier to me, as I sat at a little distance off, and affecting – but I fear very ill – a total indifference to what went forward.

‘He is asking to what corps thou belong’st?’ said another, seeing that the question puzzled me.

‘I Unfortunately I have none,’ said I. ‘I merely followed the march for curiosity.’

‘And thy father and mother, child – what will they say to thee on thy return home?’

‘I have neither father, mother, nor home,’ said I promptly.

‘Just like myself,’ said an old red-whiskered sapeur; ‘or if I

ever had parents they never had the grace to own me. Come over here, child, and take share of my dinner.'

'No, *parbleu!* I 'll have him for my comrade,' cried the young hussar. 'I was made a corporal yesterday, and have a larger ration. Sit here, my boy, and tell us how art called.'

'Maurice Tiernay.'

'Maurice will do; few of us care for more than one name, except in the dead muster they like to have it in full. Help thyself, my lad, and here's the wine-flask beside thee.'

'How comes it thou hast this old uniform, boy?' said he, pointing to my sleeve.

'It was one they gave me in the Temple,' said I. 'I was a *rat du prison* for some time.'

'Thunder of war!' exclaimed the cannonier, 'I had rather stand a whole platoon-fire than see what thou must have seen, child.'

'And hast heart to go back there, boy,' said the corporal, 'and live the same life again?'

'No, I 'll never go back,' said I. 'I 'll be a soldier.'

'Well said, *mon brave*— thou'lt be a hussar, I know.'

'If nature has given thee a good head, and a quick eye, my boy, thou might even do better, and in time, perhaps, wear a coat like mine,' said the cannonier.

'*Sacrebleu!* cried a little fellow, whose age might have been anything from boyhood to manhood – for while small of stature, he was shrivelled and wrinkled like a mummy – 'why not be satisfied with the coat he wears?'

‘And be a drummer, like thee?’ said the cannonier.

‘Just so, like me, and like Masséna – he was a drummer, too.’

‘No, no!’ cried a dozen voices together; ‘that’s not true.’

‘He’s right; Masséna was a drummer in the Eighth,’ said the cannonier; ‘I remember him when he was like that boy yonder.’

‘To be sure,’ said the little fellow, who, I now perceived, wore the dress of a *tambour*; and is it a disgrace to be the first to face the enemy?’

‘And the first to turn his back to him, comrade,’ cried another.

‘Not always – not always,’ said the little fellow, regardless of the laugh against him. ‘Had it been so, I had not gained the battle of Grandrengs on the Sambre.’

‘Thou gain a battle!’ shouted half a dozen, in derisive laughter.

‘What, Petit Pierre gained the day at Grandrengs!’ said the cannonier; ‘why, I was there myself, and never heard of that till now.’

‘I can believe it well,’ replied Pierre; ‘many a man’s merits go unacknowledged – and Kléber got all the credit that belonged to Pierre Canot.’

‘Let us hear about it, Pierre, for even thy victory is unknown by name to us poor devils of the army of Italy. How call’st thou the place?’

‘Grandrengs,’ said Pierre proudly. ‘It’s name will live as long, perhaps, as many of those high-sounding ones you have favoured us with. Mayhap, thou hast heard of Cambray?’

‘Never!’ said the hussar, shaking his head.

‘Nor of Mons, either, I’ll be sworn?’ continued Pierre.

‘Quite true, I never heard of it before.’

‘*Voilà!*’ exclaimed Pierre, in contemptuous triumph. ‘And these are the fellows that pretend to feel their country’s glory, and take pride in her conquests. Where hast thou been, lad, not to hear of places that every child syllables nowadays?’

‘I will tell you where I’ve been,’ said the hussar haughtily, and dropping at the same time the familiar ‘thee’ and ‘thou’ of soldier intercourse – ‘I’ve been at Montenotte, at Millesimo, at Mondove

‘*Allons, donc!* with your disputes,’ broke in an old grenadier; ‘as if France was not victorious whether the enemies were English or German. Let us hear how Pierre won his battle at – at –’

‘At Grandrengs,’ said Pierre. ‘They call it in the despatch the “action of the Sambre,” because Kléber came up there – and Kléber being a great man, and Pierre Canot a little one, you understand, the glory attaches to the place where the bullion epaulettes are found – just as the old King of Prussia used to say, “Le bon Dieu est toujours a côté des gros bataillons.”’

‘I see we’ll never come to this same victory of Grandrengs, with all these turnings and twistings,’ muttered the artillery sergeant.

‘Thou art very near it now, comrade, if thou’lt listen,’ said Pierre, as he wiped his mouth after a long draught of the wine-flask. ‘I’ll not weary the honourable company with any

description of the battle generally, but just confine myself to that part of it in which I was myself in action. It is well known, that though we claimed the victory of the 10th May, we did little more than keep our own, and were obliged to cross the Sambre, and be satisfied with such a position as enabled us to hold the two bridges over the river – and there we remained for four days; some said preparing for a fresh attack upon Kaunitz, who commanded the allies; some, and I believe they were right, alleging that our generals were squabbling all day, and all night, too, with two commissaries that the Government had sent down to teach us how to win battles. *Ma foi!* we had had some experience in that way ourselves, without learning the art from two citizens with tricoloured scarfs round their waists, and yellow tops to their boots! However that might be, early on the morning of the 20th we received orders to cross the river in two strong columns, and form on the opposite side; at the same time that a division was to pass the stream by boat two miles higher up, and, concealing themselves in a pine wood, be ready to take the enemy in flank, when they believed that all the force was in the front.’

‘*Sacré tonnerre!* I believe that our armies of the Sambre and the Rhine never have any other notion of battles than that eternal flank movement!’ cried a young sergeant of the voltigeurs, who had just come up from the army of Italy. ‘Our general used to split the enemy by the centre, cut him piecemeal by attack in columns, and then mow him down with artillery at short range – not leaving him time for a retreat in heavy masses –’

‘Silence, silence, and let us hear Petit Pierre!’ shouted a dozen voices, who cared far more for an incident than a scientific discussion about manoeuvres.

‘The plan I speak of was General Moreau’s,’ continued Pierre; ‘and I fancy that your Bonaparte has something to learn ere he be his equal!’

This rebuke seeming to have engaged the suffrages of the company, he went on: ‘The boat division consisted of four battalions of infantry, two batteries of light artillery, and a voltigeur company of the “Régiment de Marboeuf” – to which I was then, for the time, attached as *tambour en chef*. What fellows they were – the greatest devils in the whole army! They came from the Faubourg St. Antoine, and were as reckless and undisciplined as when they strutted the streets of Paris. When they were thrown out to skirmish, they used to play as many tricks as schoolboys: sometimes they ‘d run up to the roof of a cabin or a hut – and they could climb like cats – and, sitting down on the chimney, begin firing away at the enemy as coolly as if from a battery; sometimes they’d capture half-a-dozen asses, and ride forward as if to charge, and then, affecting to tumble off, the fellows would pick down any of the enemy’s officers that were fools enough to come near – scampering back to the cover of the line, laughing and joking as if the whole were sport. I saw one when his wrist was shattered by a shot, and he couldn’t fire, take a comrade on his back and caper away like a horse, just to tempt the Germans to come out of their lines. It was with

these blessed youths I was now to serve, for the *tambour* of the “Marboeuf” was drowned in crossing the Sambre a few days before. Well, we passed the river safely, and, unperceived by the enemy, gained the pine wood, where we formed in two columns, one of attack, and the other of support – the voltigeurs about five hundred paces in advance of the leading files. The morning was dull and hazy, for a heavy rain had fallen during the night; and the country is flat, and so much intersected with drains, and dikes, and ditches, that, after rain, the vapour is too thick to see twenty yards on any side. Our business was to make a counter-march to the right, and, guided by the noise of the cannonade, to come down upon the enemy’s flank in the thickest of the engagement. As we advanced, we found ourselves in a kind of marshy plain, planted with willows, and so thick that it was often difficult for three men to march abreast. This extended for a considerable distance; and on escaping from it we saw that we were not above a mile from the enemy’s left, which rested on a little village.’

‘I know it well,’ broke in the cannonier; ‘it’s called Huyningen.’

‘Just so. There was a formidable battery in position there; and part of the place was stockaded, as if they expected an attack. Still, there are no vedettes, nor any lookout party, so far as we could see; and our commanding officer didn’t well know what to make of it, whether it was a point of concealed strength, or a position they were about to withdraw from. At all events, it required caution; and, although the battle had already begun on the right – as a loud cannonade and a heavy smoke told us – he

halted the brigade in the wood, and held a council of his officers to see what was to be done. The resolution come to was, that the voltigeurs should advance alone to explore the way, the rest of the force remaining in ambush. We were to go out in sections of companies, and, spreading over a wide surface, see what we could of the place.

‘Scarcely was the order given, when away we went – and it was now a race who should be earliest up and exchange first shot with the enemy. Some dashed forward over the open field in front; others skulked along by dikes and ditches; some, again, dodged here and there, as cover offered its shelter; but about a dozen, of whom I was one, kept the track of a little cart-road, which, half concealed by high banks and furze, ran in a zigzag line towards the village. I was always smart of foot; and now, having newly joined the voltigeurs, was naturally eager to show myself not unworthy of my new associates. I went on at my best pace, and being lightly equipped – neither musket nor ball cartridge to carry – I soon outstripped them all; and, after about twenty minutes’ brisk running, saw in front of me a long, low farmhouse, the walls all pierced for musketry, and two small eight-pounders in battery at the gate. I looked back for my companions, but they were not up – not a man of them to be seen. “No matter,” thought I, “they’ll be here soon; meanwhile, I’ll make for that little copse of brushwood”; for a small clump of low furze and broom was standing at a little distance in front of the farm. All this time, I ought to say, not a man of the enemy was to be seen, although

I, from where I stood, could see the crenelated walls, and the guns, as they were pointed. At a distance all would seem like an ordinary peasant house.

‘As I crossed the open space to gain the copse, piff! came a bullet, whizzing past me; and just as I reached the cover, piff! came another. I ducked my head and made for the thicket; but just as I did so, my foot caught in a branch. I stumbled and pitched forward; and trying to save myself, I grasped a bough above me; it smashed suddenly, and down I went. Ay! down sure enough – for I went right through the furze, and into a well – one of those old, walled wells they have in these countries, with a huge bucket that fills up the whole space, and is worked by a chain. Luckily, the bucket was linked up near the top, and caught me, or I should have gone where there would have been no more heard of Pierre Canot; as it was, I was sorely bruised by the fall, and didn’t recover myself for full ten minutes after. Then I discovered that I was sitting in a large wooden trough, hooped with iron, and supported by two heavy chains that passed over a windlass, about ten feet above my head.

‘I was safe enough for the matter of that; at least, none were likely to discover me, as I could easily see by the rust of the chain and the grass-grown edges, that the well had been long disused. Now the position was far from being pleasant. There stood the farmhouse full of soldiers, the muskets ranging over every approach to where I lay. Of my comrades there was nothing to be seen – they had either missed the way or retreated; and so

time crept on, and I pondered on what might be going forward elsewhere, and whether it would ever be my own fortune to see my comrades again.

‘It might be an hour – it seemed three or four to me – after this, as I looked over the plain, I saw the caps of our infantry just issuing over the brushwood, and a glancing lustre of their bayonets, as the sun tipped them. They were advancing, but, as it seemed, slowly – halting at times, and then moving forward again – just like a force waiting for others to come up. At last they debouched into the plain; but, to my surprise, they wheeled about to the right, leaving the farmhouse on their flank, as if to march beyond it. This was to lose their way totally; nothing would be easier than to carry the position of the farm, for the Germans were evidently few, had no vedettes, and thought themselves in perfect security. I crept out from my ambush, and, holding my cap on a stick, tried to attract notice from our fellows, but none saw me. I ventured at last to shout aloud, but with no better success; so that, driven to the end of my resources, I set to and beat a *roulade* on the drum, thundering away with all my might, and not caring what might come of it, for I was half mad with vexation as well as despair. They heard me now; I saw a staff-officer gallop up to the head of the leading division and halt them; a volley came peppering from behind me, but without doing me any injury, for I was safe once more in my bucket. Then came another pause, and again I repeated my manœuvre, and to my delight perceived that our fellows were advancing at quick

march. I beat harder, and the drums of the grenadiers answered me. All right now, thought I, as, springing forward, I called out – “This way, boys, the wall of the orchard has scarcely a man to defend it!” and I rattled out the *pas de charge* with all my force. One crashing fire of guns and small-arms answered me from the farmhouse, and then away went the Germans as hard as they could! – such running never was seen! One of the guns they carried off with them; the tackle of the other broke, and the drivers, jumping off their saddles, took to their legs at once. Our lads were over the walls, through the windows, between the stockades, everywhere, in fact, in a minute, and, once inside, they carried all before them. The village was taken at the point of the bayonet, and in less than an hour the whole force of the brigade was advancing in full march on the enemy’s flank. There was little resistance made after that, and Kaunitz only saved his artillery by leaving his rear-guard to be cut to pieces.’

The cannonier nodded, as if in full assent, and Pierre looked around him with the air of a man who has vindicated his claim to greatness.

‘Of course,’ said he, ‘the despatch said little about Pierre Canot, but a great deal about Moreau, and Kléber, and the rest of them.’

While some were well satisfied that Pierre had well established his merits as the conqueror of ‘Grandrengs,’ others quizzed him about the heroism of lying hid in a well, and owing all his glory to a skin of parchment.

‘An’ thou wert with the army of Italy, Pierre,’ said the hussar, ‘thou ‘d have seen men march boldly to victory, and not skulk underground like a mole.’

‘I am tired of your song about this army of Italy,’ broke in the cannonier; ‘we who have served in La Vendée and the North know what fighting means as well, mayhap, as men whose boldest feats are scaling rocks and clambering up precipices. Your Bonaparte is more like one of those Guerilla chiefs they have in the “Basque,” than the general of a French army.’

‘The man who insults the army of Italy, or its chief, insults me!’ said the corporal, springing up, and casting a sort of haughty defiance around him.

‘And then?’ – asked the other.

‘And then – if he be a French soldier, he knows what should follow.’

‘*Parbleu!*’ said the cannonier coolly, ‘there would be little glory in cutting you down, and even less in being wounded by you; but if you will have it so, it’s not an old soldier of the artillery will balk your humour.’

As he spoke, he slowly arose from the ground, and tightening his waist-belt, seemed prepared to follow the other. The rest sprang to their feet at the same time, but not, as I anticipated, to offer a friendly mediation between the angry parties, but in full approval of their readiness to decide by the sword a matter too trivial to be called a quarrel.

In the midst of the whispering conferences as to place and

weapons – for the short straight sword of the artillery was very unlike the curved sabre of the hussar – the quick tramp of horses was heard, and suddenly the head of a squadron was seen, as, with glancing helmets and glittering equipments, they turned off the highroad and entered the wood.

‘Here they come! – here come the troops!’ was now heard on every side; and all question of the duel was forgotten in the greater interest inspired by the arrival of the others. The sight was strikingly picturesque; for, as they rode up, the order to dismount was given, and in an instant the whole squadron was at work picketing and unsaddling their horses; forage was shaken out before the weary and hungry beasts, kits were unpacked, cooking utensils produced, and every one busy in preparing for the bivouac. An infantry column followed close upon the others, which was again succeeded by two batteries of field-artillery and some squadrons of heavy dragoons; and now the whole wood, far and near, was crammed with soldiers, waggons, caissons, and camp equipage. To me the interest of the scene was never-ending – life, bustle, and gaiety on every side. The reckless pleasantry of the camp, too, seemed elevated by the warlike accompaniments of the picture – the caparisoned horses, the brass guns, blackened on many a battlefield, the weather-seamed faces of the hardy soldiers themselves, all conspiring to excite a high enthusiasm for the career.

Most of the equipments were new and strange to my eyes. I had never before seen the grenadiers of the Republican

Guard, with their enormous shakos, and their long-flapped vests, descending to the middle of the thigh; neither had I seen the ‘Hussars de la mort,’ in their richly braided uniform of black, and their long hair curled in ringlets at either side of the face. The cuirassiers, too, with their low cocked-hats, and straight black feathers, as well as the ‘Porte-drapeaux,’ whose brilliant uniforms, all slashed with gold, seemed scarcely in keeping with yellow-topped boots; all were now seen by me for the first time. But of all the figures which amused me most by its singularity, was that of a woman, who, in a short frock-coat and a low-crowned hat, carried a little barrel at her side, and led an ass loaded with two similar but rather larger casks. Her air and gait were perfectly soldierlike; and as she passed the different posts and sentries, she saluted them in true military fashion. I was not long to remain in ignorance of her vocation nor her name; for scarcely did she pass a group without stopping to dispense a wonderful cordial that she carried; and then I heard the familiar title of ‘La Mère Madou,’ uttered in every form of panegyric.

She was a short, stoutly built figure, somewhat past the middle of life, but without any impairment of activity in her movements. A pleasing countenance, with good teeth, and black eyes, a merry voice, and a ready tongue, were qualities more than sufficient to make her a favourite with the soldiers, whom I found she had followed to more than one battlefield.

‘*Peste!*’ cried an old grenadier, as he spat out the liquor on the ground. ‘This is one of those sweet things they make in Holland;

it smacks of treacle and bad lemons.’

‘Ah, Grogard!’ said she, laughing, ‘thou art more used to corn-brandy, with a clove of garlick in’t, than to good curaçoa.’

‘What, curaçoa! Mère Madou, has got curaçoa there?’ cried a grey-whiskered captain, as he turned on his saddle at the word.

‘Yes, *mon capitaine*, and such as no burgomaster ever drank better’; and she filled out a little glass and presented it gracefully to him.

‘*Encore! ma bonne mère,*’ said he, as he wiped his thick moustache; ‘that liquor is another reason for extending the blessings of liberty to the brave Dutch.’

‘Didn’t I tell you so?’ said she, refilling the glass; ‘but, holloa, there goes Grégoire at full speed. Ah, scoundrels that ye are, I see what ye ‘ve done.’ And so was it; some of the wild young voltigeur fellows had fastened a lighted furze-bush to the beast’s tail, and had set him at a gallop through the very middle of the encampment, upsetting tents, scattering cooking-pans, and tumbling the groups, as they sat, in every direction.

The confusion was tremendous, for the picketed horses jumped about, and some, breaking loose, galloped here and there, while others set off with half-unpacked waggons, scattering their loading as they went.

It was only when the blazing furze had dropped off, that the whole cause of the mischance would suffer himself to be captured and led quietly back to his mistress. Half crying with joy, and still wild with anger, she kissed the beast and abused

her tormentors by turns.

‘Cannoniers that ye are,’ she cried, ‘*ma foi!* you’ll have little taste for fire when the day comes that ye should face it! *Pauvre Grégoire*, they’ve left thee a tail like a *tirailleur*’s feather! Plagues light on the thieves that did it! Come here, boy,’ said she, addressing me, ‘hold, the bridle; what’s thy corps, lad?’

‘I have none now; I only followed the soldiers from Paris.’

‘Away with thee, street runner; away with thee, then,’ said she contemptuously; ‘there are no pockets to pick here; and if there were, thou ‘d lose thy ears for the doing it. Be off, then – back with thee to Paris and all its villainies. There are twenty thousand of thy trade there, but there’s work for ye all.’

‘Nay, mère, don’t be harsh with the boy,’ said a soldier; ‘you can see by his coat that his heart is with us.’

‘And he stole that, I’ll be sworn,’ said she, pulling me round, by the arm, full in front of her. ‘Answer me, *gamin*, where didst find that old tawdry jacket?’

‘I got it in a place where, if they had hold of thee and thy bad tongue, it would fare worse with thee than thou thinkest,’ said I, maddened by the imputed theft and insolence together.

‘And where may that be, young slip of the galleys?’ cried she angrily.

‘In the “Prison du Temple.”’

‘Is that their livery, then?’ said she, laughing and pointing at me with ridicule, ‘or is it a family dress made after thy father’s?’

‘My father wore a soldier’s coat, and bravely, too,’ said I, with

difficulty restraining the tears that rose to my eyes.

‘In what regiment, boy?’ asked the soldier who spoke before.

‘In one that exists no longer,’ said I sadly, and not wishing to allude to a service that would find but slight favour in republican ears.

‘That must be the 24th of the Line; they were cut to pieces at “Tongres.”’

‘No – no, he ‘s thinking of the 9th, that got so roughly handled at Fontenoy,’ said another.

‘Of neither,’ said I; ‘I am speaking of those who have left nothing but a name behind them – the Garde du Corps of the king.’

‘*Voilà!* cried Madou, clapping her hands in astonishment at my impertinence; ‘there’s an aristocrat for you! Look at him, *mes braves!* it’s not every day we have the grand seigneurs condescending to come amongst us! You can learn something of courtly manners from the polished descendant of our nobility. Say, boy, art a count, or a baron, or perhaps a duke?’

‘Make way there – out of the road, Mère Madou,’ cried a dragoon, curveting his horse in such a fashion as almost to upset ass and *cantinière* together, ‘the staff is coming.’

The mere mention of the word sent numbers off in full speed to their quarters; and now all was haste and bustle to prepare for the coming inspection. The mère’s endeavours to drag her beast along were not very successful, for, with the peculiar instinct of his species, the more necessity there was of speed, the lazier he

became; and as every one had his own concerns to look after, she was left to her own unaided efforts to drive him forward.

‘Thou’lt have a day in prison if thou’rt found here, Mère Madou,’ said a dragoon, as he struck the ass with the flat of his sabre.

‘I know it well,’ cried she passionately; ‘but I have none to help me. Come here, lad; be good-natured, and forget what passed. Take his bridle while I whip him on.’

I was at first disposed to refuse, but her pitiful face and sad plight made me think better of it, and I seized the bridle at once; but just as I had done so, the escort galloped forward, and the dragoons coming on the flank of the miserable beast, over he went, barrels and all, crushing me beneath him as he fell.

‘Is the boy hurt?’ were the last words I heard, as I fainted; but a few minutes after I found myself seated on the grass, while a soldier was stanching the blood that ran freely from a cut in my forehead.

‘It is a trifle, general – a mere scratch,’ said a young officer to an old man on horseback beside him, ‘and the leg is not broken.’

‘Glad of it,’ said the old officer; ‘casualties are insufferable, except before an enemy. Send the lad to his regiment.’

‘He’s only a camp-follower, general. He does not belong to us.’

‘There, my lad, take this, then, and make thy way back to Paris,’ said the old general, as he threw me a small piece of money.

I looked up, and, straight before me, saw the same officer who

had given me the assignat the night before.

‘General Lacoste!’ cried I, in delight, for I thought him already a friend.

‘How is this – have I an acquaintance here?’ said he, smiling; ‘on my life! it’s the young rogue I met this morning. Eh! art not thou the artillery-driver I spoke to at the barrack?’

‘Yes, general, the same.’

‘*Diantre!* It seems fated, then, that we are not to part company so easily; for hadst thou remained in Paris, lad, we had most probably never met again.’

‘*Ainsi, je suis bien tombé, general?*’ said I, punning upon my accident.

He laughed heartily, less, I suppose, at the jest, which was a poor one, than at the cool impudence with which I uttered it, and then turning to one of the staff, said —

‘I spoke to Bertholet about this boy already; see that they take him in the 9th. I say, my lad, what’s thy name?’

‘Tiernay, sir.’

‘Ay, to be sure, Tiernay. Well, Tiernay, thou shalt be a hussar, my man. See that I get no disgrace by the appointment.’

I kissed his hand fervently, and the staff rode forward, leaving me the happiest heart that beat in all the crowded host.

CHAPTER VII. A PASSING ACQUAINTANCE

If the guide who is to lead us on a long and devious track stops at every byway, following out each path that seems to invite a ramble or suggest a halt, we naturally might feel distrustful of his safe conduct, and uneasy at the prospect of the road before us. In the same way may the reader be disposed to fear that he who descends to slight and trivial circumstances will scarcely have time for events which ought to occupy a wider space in his reminiscences; and for this reason I am bound to apologise for the seeming transgression of my last chapter. Most true it is, that were I to relate the entire of my life with a similar diffuseness, my memoir would extend to a length far beyond what I intend it to occupy. Such, however, is very remote from my thoughts. I have dwelt with, perhaps, something of prolixity upon the soldier-life and characteristics of a past day, because I shall yet have to speak of changes, without which the contrast would be inappreciable; but I have also laid stress upon an incident trivial in itself, because it formed an event in my own fortunes. It was thus, in fact, that I became a soldier.

Now, the man who carries a musket in the ranks may very reasonably be deemed but a small ingredient of the mass that forms an army; and in our day his thoughts, hopes, fears, and

ambitions are probably as unknown and uncared for as the precise spot of earth that yielded the ore from which his own weapon was smelted. This is not only reasonable, but it is right in the time of which I am now speaking it was far otherwise. The Republic, in extinguishing a class, had elevated the individual, and now each, in whatever station he occupied, felt himself qualified to entertain opinions and express sentiments which, because they were his own, he presumed them to be national. The idlers of the streets discussed the deepest questions of politics; the soldiers talked of war with all the presumption of consummate generalship. The great operations of a campaign, and the various qualities of different commanders, were the daily subjects of dispute in the camp. Upon one topic only were all agreed; and there, indeed, our unanimity repaid all previous discordance. We deemed France the only civilised nation of the globe, and reckoned that people thrice happy who, by any contingency of fortune, engaged our sympathy, or procured the distinction of our presence in arms. We were the heaven-born disseminators of freedom throughout Europe, the sworn enemies of kingly domination, and the missionaries of a political creed, which was not alone to ennoble mankind, but to render its condition eminently happy and prosperous.

There could not be an easier lesson to learn than this, and particularly when dinned into your ears all day, and from every rank and grade around you. It was the programme of every message from the Directory; it was the opening of every general

order from the general; it was the table-talk of your mess. The burthen of every song, the title of every military march performed by the regimental band, recalled it; even the riding-master, as he followed the recruit around the weary circle, whip in hand, mingled the orders he uttered with apposite axioms upon republican grandeur. How I think I hear it still! as the grim old quartermaster-sergeant, with his Alsatian accent and deep-toned voice, would call out —

‘Elbows back! – wrist lower and free from the side – free, I say, as every citizen of a great Republic! – head erect, as a Frenchman has a right to carry it! – chest full out, like one who can breathe the air of heaven, and ask no leave from king or despot! – down with your heel, sir; think that you crush a tyrant beneath it!’

Such and such like were the running commentaries on equitation, till often I forgot whether the lesson had more concern with a seat on horseback or the great cause of monarchy throughout Europe. I suppose, to use a popular phrase of our own day, ‘the system worked well’; certainly the spirit of the army was unquestionable. From the grim old veteran, with snow-white moustache, to the beardless, boy, there was but one hope and wish – the glory of France. How they understood that glory, or in what it essentially consisted, is another and very different question.

Enrolled as a soldier in the ninth regiment of Hussars, I accompanied that corps to Nancy, where, at that time, a large cavalry school was formed, and where the recruits from the

different regiments were trained and managed before being sent forward to their destination.

A taste for equitation, and a certain aptitude for catching up the peculiar character of the different horses, at once distinguished me in the riding-school, and I was at last adopted by the riding-master of the regiment as a kind of aide to him in his walk. When I thus became a bold and skilful horseman, my proficiency interfered with my promotion, for instead of accompanying my regiment I was detained at Nancy, and attached to the permanent staff of the cavalry school there.

At first I asked for nothing better. It was a life of continued pleasure and excitement, and while I daily acquired knowledge of a subject which interested me deeply, I grew tall and strong of limb, and with that readiness in danger, and that cool collectedness in moments of difficulty, that are so admirably taught by the accidents and mischances of a cavalry riding-school.

The most vicious and unmanageable beasts from the Limousin were often sent to us, and when any one of these was deemed peculiarly untractable, 'Give him to Tiernay' was the last appeal, before abandoning him as hopeless. I'm certain I owe much of the formation of my character to my life at this period, and that my love of adventure, my taste for excitement, my obstinate resolution to conquer a difficulty, my inflexible perseverance when thwarted, and my eager anxiety for praise, were all picked up amid the sawdust and tan of the riding-school. How long I

might have continued satisfied with such triumphs, and content to be the wonder of the freshly joined conscripts, I know not, when accident, or something very like it, decided the question.

It was a calm, delicious evening in April, in the year after I had entered the school, that I was strolling alone on the old fortified wall, which, once a strong redoubt, was the favourite walk of the good citizens of Nancy. I was somewhat tired with the fatigues of the day, and sat down to rest under one of the acacia-trees, whose delicious blossom was already scenting the air. The night was still and noiseless; not a man moved along the wall; the hum of the city was gradually subsiding, and the lights in the cottages over the plain told that the labourer was turning homeward from his toil. It was an hour to invite calm thoughts, and so I fell adreaming over the tranquil pleasures of a peasant's life, and the unruffled peace of an existence passed amid scenes that were endeared by years of intimacy. 'How happily,' thought I, 'time must steal on in these quiet spots, where the strife and struggle of war are unknown, and even the sounds of conflict never reach!' Suddenly my musings were broken in upon by hearing the measured tramp of cavalry, as at a walk; a long column wound their way along the zigzag approaches, which by many a redoubt and fosse, over many a drawbridge, and beneath many a strong arch, led to the gates of Nancy. The loud, sharp call of a trumpet was soon heard, and, after a brief parley, the massive gates of the fortress were opened for the troops to enter. From the position I occupied exactly over the gate, I could not only see the long,

dark line of armed men as they passed, but also hear the colloquy which took place as they entered —

‘What regiment?*

‘Detachments of the 12th Dragoons and the 22nd Chasseurs à cheval.’

‘Where from?’

‘Valence.’

‘Whereto?’

‘The army of the Rhine.’

‘Pass on!’

And with the words the ringing sound of the iron-shod horses was heard beneath the vaulted entrance. As they issued from beneath the long deep arch, the men were formed in line along two sides of a wide ‘Place’ inside the walls, where, with that despatch that habit teaches, the billets were speedily distributed, and the parties ‘told off’ in squads for different parts of the city. The force seemed a considerable one, and with all the celerity they could employ, the billeting occupied a long time. As I watched the groups moving off, I heard the direction given to one party, ‘Cavalry School – Rue de Lorraine.’ The young officer who commanded the group took a direction exactly the reverse of the right one; and hastening down from the rampart, I at once overtook them, and explained the mistake. I offered them my guidance to the place, which being willingly accepted, I walked along at their side.

Chatting as we went, I heard that the dragoons were hastily

withdrawn from La Vendee to form part of the force under General Hoche. The young sous-lieutenant, a mere boy of my own age, had already served in two campaigns in Holland and the south of France; had been wounded in the Loire, and received his grade of officer at the hands of Hoche himself on the field of battle.

He could speak of no other name – Hoche was the hero of all his thoughts; his gallantry, his daring, his military knowledge, his coolness in danger, his impetuosity in attack, his personal amiability, the mild gentleness of his manner, were themes the young soldier loved to dwell on; and however pressed by me to talk of war and its chances, he inevitably came back to the one loved theme – his general.

When the men were safely housed for the night, I invited my new friend to my own quarters, where, having provided the best entertainment I could afford, we passed more than half the night in chatting. There was nothing above mediocrity in the look or manner of the youth; his descriptions of what he had seen were unmarked by anything glowing or picturesque; his observations did not evince either a quick or a reflective mind, and yet, over this mass of commonplace, enthusiasm for his leader had shed a rich glow, like a gorgeous sunlight on a landscape, that made all beneath it seem brilliant and splendid.

‘And now,’ said he, after an account of the last action he had seen, ‘and now, enough of myself; let’s talk of thee. Where hast thou been?’

‘Here!’ said I, with a sigh, and in a voice that shame had almost made inaudible. ‘Here, here, at Nancy.’

‘Not always here?’

‘Just so. Always here.’

‘And what doing, *mon cher*? Thou art not one of the Municipal Guard, surely?’

‘No,’ said I, smiling sadly, ‘I belong to the “École d’Équitation.”’

‘Ah, that’s it,’ said he, in somewhat of confusion; ‘I always thought they selected old Serjeants *en retraite*, worn-out veterans, and wounded fellows, for riding-school duty.’

‘Most of ours are such,’ said I, my shame increasing at every word – ‘but somehow they chose me also, and I had no will in the matter – ’

‘No will in the matter, *parbleu!* and why not? Every man in France has a right to meet the enemy in the field. Thou art a soldier, a hussar of the 9th, a brave and gallant corps, and art to be told that thy comrades have the road to fame and honour open to them, whilst thou art to mope away life like an invalided drummer? It is too gross an indignity, my boy, and must not be borne. Away with you to-morrow at daybreak to the état-major; ask to see the Commandant. You’re in luck, too, for our colonel is with him now, and he is sure to back your request. Say that you served in the school to oblige your superiors, but that you cannot see all chances of distinction lost to you for ever by remaining there. They’ve given you no grade yet, I see,’ continued

he, looking at my arm.

‘None; I am still a private.’

‘And I a sous-lieutenant, just because I have been where powder was flashing! You can ride well, of course?’

‘I defy the wildest Limousin to shake me in my saddle.’

‘And, as a swordsman, what are you?’

‘Gros Jean calls me his best pupil.’

‘Ah, true! you have Gros Jean here, the best *sabreur* in France! And here you are – a horseman, and one of Gros Jean’s *élèves* – rotting away life in Nancy! Have you any friends in the service?’

‘Not one.’

‘Not one! Nor relations, nor connections?’

‘None. I am Irish by descent. My family are only French by one generation.’

‘Irish! Ah! that’s lucky too,’ said he. ‘Our colonel is an Irishman. His name is Mahon. You’re certain of getting your leave now. I’ll present you to him to-morrow. We are to halt two days here, and before that is over, I hope you’ll have made your last caracole in the riding-school of Nancy.’

‘But remember,’ cried I, ‘that although Irish by family, I have never been there. I know nothing of either the people or the language – and do not present me to the general as his countryman.’

‘I’ll call you by your name, as a soldier of the 9th Hussars, and leave you to make out your claim as countrymen, if you please,

together.'

This course was now agreed upon, and after some further talking, my friend, refusing all my offers of a bed, coolly wrapped his cloak about him, and, with his head on the table, fell fast asleep, long before I had ceased thinking over his stories and his adventures in camp and battlefield.

CHAPTER VIII. 'TRONCHON'

My duties in the riding-school were always over before mid-day, and as noon was the hour appointed by the young lieutenant to present me to his colonel, I was ready by that time, and anxiously awaiting his arrival. I had done my best to smarten up my uniform, and make all my accoutrements bright and glistening. My scabbard was polished like silver, the steel front of my shako shone like a mirror, and the tinsel lace of my jacket had undergone a process of scrubbing and cleaning that threatened its very existence. My smooth chin and beardless upper-lip, however, gave me a degree of distress that all other deficiencies failed to inflict. I can dare to say, that no mediaeval gentleman's bald spot ever cost him one-half the misery as did my lack of moustache occasion me. 'A hussar without beard, as well without spurs or sabretache'; a tambour major without his staff, a cavalry charger without a tail, couldn't be more ridiculous; and there was that old serjeant of the riding-school, 'Tron-chon,' with a beard that might have made a mattress! How the goods of this world are unequally distributed! thought I; still why might he not spare me a little – a very little would suffice – just enough to give the 'air hussar' to my countenance. He's an excellent creature, the kindest old fellow in the world. I 'm certain he 'd not refuse me. To be sure, the beard is a red one, and pretty much like bell-wire in consistence; no matter, better that than this girlish smooth chin

I now wear.

Tronchon was spelling out the *Moniteurs* account of the Italian campaign as I entered his room, and found it excessively difficult to get back from the Alps and Apennines to the humble request I preferred.

‘Poor fellows!’ muttered he – ‘four battles in seven days, without stores of any kind or rations – almost without bread; and here comest thou, whining because thou hasn’t a beard.’

‘If I were not a hussar – ’

‘Bah!’ said he, interrupting, ‘what of that? Where shouldst thou have had thy baptism of blood, boy? Art a child – nothing more.’

‘I shared my quarters last night with one, not older, Tronchon, and he was an officer, and had seen many a battlefield.’

‘I know that, too,’ said the veteran, with an expression of impatience – ‘and that General Bonaparte will give every boy his epaulettes before an old and tried soldier.’

‘It was not Bonaparte. It was – ’

‘I care not who promoted the lad; the system is just the same with them all. It is no longer, “Where have you served? – what have you seen?” but, “Can you read glibly? – can you write faster than speak? – have you learned to take towns upon paper, and attack a breastwork with a rule and a pair of compasses?” This is what they called “*le génie*” “*le génie*” – ha! ha! ha!’ cried he, laughing heartily; ‘that’s the name old women used to give the devil when I was a boy.’

It was with the greatest difficulty I could get him back from these disagreeable reminiscences to the object of my visit, and, even then, I could hardly persuade him that I was serious in asking the loan of a beard. The prayer of my petition being once understood, he discussed the project gravely enough; but to my surprise he was far more struck by the absurd figure *he* should cut with his diminished mane, than *I* with my mock moustache.

‘There’s not a child in Nancy won’t laugh at me – they’ll cry, “There goes old Tronchon – he’s like Kléber’s charger, which the German cut the tail off, to make a shako plume!”’

‘I assured him that he might as well pretend to miss one tree in the forest of Fontainebleau – that after furnishing a squadron like myself, his would be still the first beard in the Republic; and at last he yielded, and gave in.

Never did a little damsel of the nursery array her doll with more delighted looks, and gaze upon her handiwork with more self-satisfaction, than did old Tronchon survey me, as, with the aid of a little gum, he decorated my lip with a stiff line of his iron-red beard.

‘*Diantre!*’ cried he, in ecstasy, ‘if thou ben’t something like a man after all. Who would have thought it would have made such a change? Thou might pass for one that saw real smoke and real fire, any day, lad. Ay! thou hast another look in thine eye, and another way to carry thy head, now! Trust me, thou’lt look a different fellow on the left of the squadron.’

I began to think so too, as I looked at myself in the small

triangle of a looking-glass which decorated Tronchon's wall, under a picture of Kellermann, his first captain. I fancied that the improvement was most decided. I thought that, bating a little over-ferocity, a something verging upon the cruel, I was about as perfect a type of the hussar as need be. My jacket seemed to fit tighter – my pelisse hung more jauntily – my shako sat more saucily on one side of my head – my sabre banged more proudly against my boot – my very spurs jangled with a pleasanter music – and all because a little hair bristled over my lip, and curled in two spiral flourishes across my cheek! I longed to see the effect of my changed appearance, as I walked down the 'Place Carrière,' or sauntered into the café where my comrades used to assemble. What will Mademoiselle Josephine say, thought I, as I ask for my *petit verre*, caressing my moustache thus! Not a doubt of it, what a fan is to a woman a beard is to a soldier! – a something to fill up the pauses in conversation, by blandly smoothing with the finger, or fiercely curling at the point.

'And so thou art going to ask for thy grade, Maurice?' broke in Tronchon, after a long silence.

'Not at all. I am about to petition for employment upon active service. I don't seek promotion till I have deserved it.'

'Better still, lad. I was eight years myself in the ranks before they gave me the stripe on my arm. *Parbleu!* the Germans had given me some three or four with the sabre before that time.'

'Do you think they 'll refuse me, Tronchon?'

'Not if thou go the right way about it, lad. Thou mustn't fancy

it's like asking leave from the captain to spend the evening in a *guinguette*, or to go to the play with thy sweetheart. No, no, boy. It must be done *en règle*. Thou'lt have to wait on the general at his quarters at four o'clock, when he "receives," as they call it. Thou'lt be there, mayhap, an hour, ay, two or three belike, and after all, perhaps, won't see him that day at all! I was a week trying to catch Kellermann, and, at last, he only spoke to me going downstairs with his staff —

"Eh, Tronchon, another bullet in thy old carcass; want a furlough to get strong again, eh?"

"No, colonel; all sound this time. I want to be a sergeant — I'm twelve years and four months corporal."

"Slow work, too," said he, laughing; "ain't it, Charles?" and he pinched one of his young officers by the cheek. "Let old Tronchon have his grade; and I say, my good fellow," said he to me, "don't come plaguing me any more about promotion till I'm General of Division. You hear that?"

'Well, he's got his step since; but I never teased him after.'

'And why so, Tronchon?' said L

'I'll tell thee, lad,' whispered he, in a low, confidential tone, as if imparting a secret well worth the hearing. 'They can find fellows every day fit for lieutenants and *chefs d'escadron*. *Parbleu!* they meet with them in every café, in every "billiard" you enter; but a sergeant! Maurice, one that drills his men on parade — can dress them like a wall — see that every kit is well packed, and every cartouch well filled — who knows every soul

in his company as he knows the buckles of his own sword-belt – that’s what one should not chance upon in haste. It’s easy enough to manoeuvre the men, Maurice; but to make them, boy, to fashion the fellows so that they be like the pieces of a great machine, that’s the real labour – that’s soldiering indeed.’

‘And you say I must write a petition, Tronchon?’ said I, more anxious to bring him back to my own affairs than listen to these speculations of his. ‘How shall I do it?’

‘Sit down there, lad, and I’ll tell thee. I’ve done the thing some scores of times, and know the words as well as I once knew my “Pater.” *Parbleu!* I often wish I could remember that now, just to keep me from gloomy thoughts when I sit alone of an evening.’

It was not a little to his astonishment, but still more to his delight, that I told the poor fellow I could help to refresh his memory, knowing, as I did, every word of the litanies by heart; and, accordingly, it was agreed on that I should impart religious instruction in exchange for the secular knowledge he was conferring upon me.

‘As for the petition,’ said Tronchon, seating himself opposite to me at the table, ‘it is soon done; for mark me, lad, these things must always be short; if thou be long-winded, they put thee away, and tell some of the clerks to look after thee – and there’s an end of it. Be brief, therefore, and next – be legible – write in a good, large, round hand; just as, if thou wert speaking, thou wouldst talk with a fine, clear, distinct voice. Well, then, begin thus: – “Republic of France, one and indivisible!” Make a flourish round

that, lad, as if it came freely from the pen. When a man writes – “France!” he should do it as he whirls his sabre round his head in a charge! Ay, just so.’

‘I ‘m ready, Tronchon, go on.’

“*Mon Général!*” Nay, nay — *Général* mustn’t be as large as *France*— yes, that’s better. “The undersigned, whose certificates of service and conduct are herewith inclosed.” Stay, stop a moment, Tronchon; don’t forget that I have got neither one nor t’other. No matter; I’ll make thee out both. Where was I? – Ay, “herewith inclosed; and whose wounds, as the accompanying report will show – “

‘Wounds! I never received one.’

‘No matter, I’ll – eh – what? *Feu d’enfer!* how stupid I am! What have I been thinking of? Why, boy, it was a sick-furlough I was about to ask for – the only kind of petition I have ever had to write in a life long.’

‘And *I* am asking for active service.’

‘Ha! That came without asking for in my case.’

‘Then what’s to be done, Tronchon? – clearly this won’t do!’

He nodded sententiously an assent, and, after a moment’s rumination, said —

‘It strikes me, lad, there can be no need of begging for that which usually comes unlooked for; but if thou don’t choose to wait for thy billet for t’other world, but must go and seek it, the best way will be to up and tell the general as much.’

‘That was exactly my intention.’

‘If he asks thee, “Canst ride?” just say, “Old Tronchon taught me”; he ‘ll be one of the young hands, indeed, if he don’t know that name! And, mind, lad, have no whims or caprices about whatever service he names thee for, even were ‘t the infantry itself! It’s a hard word, that – I know it well; but a man must make up his mind for anything and everything. Wear any coat, go anywhere, face any enemy thou ‘rt ordered, and have none of those newfangled notions about this general, or that army. Be a good soldier and a good comrade. Share thy kit and thy purse to the last sou, for it will not only be generous in thee, but that so long as thou hoardest not, thou’lt never be over-eager for pillage. Mind these things, and with a stout heart and a sharp sabre, Maurice, *tu iras loin*. Yes, I tell thee again, lad, *tu iras loin*.’

I give these three words as he said them, for they have rung in my ears throughout all my life long. In moments of gratified ambition, in the glorious triumph of success, they have sounded to me like the confirmed predictions of one who foresaw my elevation in less prosperous hours. When fortune has looked dark and lowering, they have been my comforter and support, telling me not to be downcast or depressed, that the season of sadness would pass away, and the road to fame and honour again open before me.

‘You really think so, Tronchon? You think that I shall be something yet?’

‘*Tu iras loin*, I say,’ repeated he emphatically, and with the air of an oracle who would not suffer further interrogation. I

therefore shook his hand cordially, and set out to pay my visit to the general.

CHAPTER IX. A SCRAPE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

When I reached the quarters of the état-major, I found the great courtyard of the 'hotel' crowded with soldiers of every rank and arm of the service. Some were newly joined recruits waiting for the orders to be forwarded to their respective regiments, some were invalids just issued from the hospital, some were sick and wounded on their way homeward. There were sergeants with their billet-rolls, and returns, and court-martial sentences. Adjutants with regimental documents hastening hither and thither. Mounted orderlies, too, continually came and went; all was bustle, movement, and confusion. Officers in staff uniforms called out the orders from the different windows, and despatches were sent off here and there with hot haste. The building was the ancient palace of the Dukes of Lorraine, and a splendid fountain of white marble in the centre of the *cour*, still showed the proud armorial bearings of that princely house. Around the sculptured base of this now were seated groups of soldiers, their war-worn looks and piled arms contrasting strangely enough with the great porcelain vases of flowering plants that still decorated the rich plateau. Shakos, helmets, and greatcoats were hung upon the orange-trees. The heavy boots of the cuirassier, the white leather apron of the sapeur, were drying

along the marble benches of the terrace. The richly traceried veining of gilt iron-work, which separated the court from the garden, was actually covered with belts, swords, bayonets, and horse-gear, in every stage and process of cleaning. Within the garden itself, however, all was silent and still – two sentries, who paced backwards and forwards beneath the grille, showing that the spot was to be respected by those whose careless gestures and reckless air betrayed how little influence the mere ‘genius of the place’ would exercise over them.

To me the interest of everything was increasing; and whether I lingered to listen to the raw remarks of the new recruit, in wonder at all he saw, or stopped to hear the campaigning stories of the old soldiers of the army, I never wearied. Few, if any, knew whither they were going – perhaps to the north to join the army of the Sambre; perhaps to the east to the force upon the Rhine. It might be that they were destined for Italy – none cared! Meanwhile, at every moment, detachments moved off, and their places were filled by fresh arrivals – all dusty and wayworn from the march. Some had scarcely time to eat a hurried morsel, when they were called on to ‘fall in,’ and again the word ‘forward’ was given. Such of the infantry as appeared too weary for the march were sent on in great charrettes drawn by six or eight horses, and capable of carrying forty men in each; and of these there seemed to be no end. No sooner was one detachment away than another succeeded. Whatever their destination, one thing seemed evident, the urgency that called them was beyond the common.

For a while I forgot all about myself in the greater interest of the scene; but then came the thought that I too should have my share in this onward movement, and now I set out to seek for my young friend, the sous-lieutenant. I had not asked his name, but his regiment I knew to be the 22nd Chasseurs à cheval. The uniform was light green, and easily enough to be recognised; yet nowhere was it to be seen. There were cuirassiers, and hussars, heavy dragoons, and carabiniers in abundance – everything, in short, but what I sought.

At last I asked of an old quartermaster where the 22nd were quartered, and heard, to my utter dismay, that they had marched that morning at eight o'clock. There were two more squadrons expected to arrive at noon, but the orders were that they were to proceed without further halt.

‘And whither to,’ asked I.

‘To Treves, on the Moselle,’ said he, and turned away as if he would not be questioned further. It was true that my young friend could not have been much of a patron, yet the loss of him was deeply felt by me. He was to have introduced me to his colonel, who probably might have obtained the leave I desired at once; and now I knew no one, not one even to advise me how to act. I sat down upon a bench to think, but could resolve on nothing; the very sight of that busy scene had now become a reproach to me. There were the veterans of a hundred battles hastening forward again to the field; there were the young soldiers just flushed with recent victory; even the peasant boys were ‘eager

for the fray'; but I alone was to have no part in the coming glory. The enthusiasm of all around only served to increase and deepen my depression. There was not one there, from the old and war-worn veteran of the ranks to the merest boy, with whom I would not gladly have exchanged fortunes. Some hours passed over in these gloomy reveries, and when I looked up from the stupor my own thoughts had thrown over me, the *cour* was almost empty. A few sick soldiers, waiting for their billets of leave, a few recruits not yet named to any corps, and a stray orderly or two standing beside his horse, were all that remained.

I arose to go away, but in my preoccupation of mind, instead of turning toward the street, I passed beneath a large archway into another court of the building, somewhat smaller, but much richer in decoration and ornament than the outer one. After spending some time admiring the quaint devices and grim heads which peeped out from all the architraves and friezes, my eye was caught by a low, arched doorway, in the middle of which was a small railed window, like the grille of a convent. I approached, and perceived that it led into a garden, by a long, narrow walk of clipped yew, dense and upright as a wall. The trimly raked gravel, and the smooth surface of the hedge, showed the care bestowed on the grounds to be a wide contrast to the neglect exhibited in the mansion itself; a narrow border of hyacinths and carnations ran along either side of the walk, the gorgeous blossoms appearing in strong relief against the background of dark foliage.

The door, as I leaned against it, gently yielded to the pressure of my arm, and almost without knowing it, I found myself standing within the precincts of the garden. My first impulse, of course, was to retire and close the door again, but somehow, I never knew exactly why, I could not resist the desire to see a little more of a scene so tempting. There was no mark of footsteps on the gravel, and I thought it likely the garden was empty. On I went, therefore, at first with cautious and uncertain steps, at last with more confidence, for as I issued from the hedge-walk, and reached an open space beyond, the solitude seemed unbroken. Fruit-trees, loaded with blossom, stood in a closely shaven lawn, through which a small stream meandered, its banks planted with daffodils and water-lilies. Some pheasants moved about through the grass, but without alarm at my presence; while a young fawn boldly came over to me, and although in seeming disappointment at not finding an old friend, continued to walk beside me as I went.

The grounds appeared of great extent: paths led off in every direction; and while, in some places, I could perceive the glittering roof and sides of a conservatory, in others the humble culture of a vegetable garden was to be seen. There was a wondrous fascination in the calm and tranquil solitude around; and coming, as it did, so immediately after the busy bustle of the 'soldiering,' I soon not only forgot that I was an intruder there, but suffered myself to wander 'fancy free,' following out the thoughts each object suggested. I believe at that moment, if

the choice were given me, I would rather have been the ‘Adam of that Eden’ than the proudest of those generals that ever led a column to victory! Fortunately, or unfortunately – it would not be easy to decide which – the alternative was not open to me. It was while I was still musing, I found myself at the foot of a little eminence, on which stood a tower whose height and position showed it had been built for the view it afforded over a vast tract of country. Even from where I stood, at its base, I could see over miles and miles of a great plain, with the main roads leading towards the north and eastward. This spot was also the boundary of the grounds, and a portion of the old boulevard of the town formed the defence against the open country beyond. It was a deep ditch, with sides of sloping sward, cropped neatly, and kept in trimmest order, but, from its depth and width, forming a fence of a formidable kind. I was peering cautiously down into the abyss, when I heard a voice so close to my ear that I started with surprise. I listened, and perceived that the speaker was directly above me, and leaning over the battlements at the top of the tower.

‘You’re quite right,’ cried he, as he adjusted a telescope to his eye, and directed his view towards the plain. ‘He has gone wrong! He has taken the Strasbourg road, instead of the northern one.’

An exclamation of anger followed these words; and now I saw the telescope passed to another hand, and, to my astonishment, that of a lady.

‘Was there ever stupidity like that? He saw the map like the

others, and yet – *Parbleu!* it's too bad!"

I could perceive that a female voice made some rejoinder, but did not distinguish the words; when the man again spoke —

‘No, no; it's all a blunder of that old major; and here am I without an orderly to send after him. *Diable!* it is provoking.’

‘Isn't that one of your people at the foot of the tower?’ said the lady, as she pointed to where I stood, praying for the earth to open and close over me; for, as he moved his head to look down, I saw the epaulettes of a staff-officer.

‘Holloa!’ cried he, ‘are you on duty?’

‘No, sir; I was — ’

Not waiting for me to finish an explanation, he went on —

‘Follow that division of cavalry that has taken the Strasbourg road, and tell Major Roquelard that he has gone wrong; he should have turned off to the left at the suburbs. Lose no time, but away at once. You are mounted, of course?’

‘No, sir, my horse is at quarters; but I can — ’

‘No, no; it will be too late,’ he broke in again. ‘Take my troop-horse, and be off. You'll find him in the stable to your left.’

Then turning to the lady I heard him say —

‘It may save Roquelard from an arrest.’

I did not wait for more, but hurried off in the direction he had pointed. A short gravel walk brought me in front of a low building, in the cottage style, but which, decorated with emblems of the chase, I guessed to be the stable. Not a groom was to be seen; but the door being unlatched I entered freely. Four

large and handsome horses were feeding at the racks, their glossy coats and long silken manes showing the care bestowed upon them. Which is the trooper? thought I, as I surveyed them all with keen and scrutinising eye. All my skill in such matters was unable to decide the point; they seemed all alike valuable and handsome – in equally high condition, and exhibiting equal marks of careful treatment. Two were stamped on the haunches with the letters ‘R. F.’; and these, of course, were cavalry horses. One was a powerful black horse, whose strong quarters and deep chest bespoke great action, while the backward glances of his eye indicated the temper of a ‘tartar.’ Making choice of him without an instant’s hesitation, I threw on the saddle, adjusted the stirrups to my own length, buckled the bridle, and led him forth. In all my ‘school experience’ I had never seen an animal that pleased me so much; his well-arched neck and slightly dipped back showed that an Arab cross had mingled with the stronger qualities of the Norman horse. I sprang to my saddle with delight; to be astride such a beast was to kindle up all the enthusiasm of my nature; and as I grasped the reins, and urged him forward, I was half wild with excitement.

Apparently the animal was accustomed to more gentle treatment, for he gave a loud snort, such as a surprised or frightened horse will give, and then bounded forward once or twice, as if to dismount me. This failing, he reared up perfectly straight, pawing madly, and threatening even to fall backwards. I saw that I had, indeed, selected a wicked one; for in every bound

and spring, in every curvet and leap, the object was clearly to unseat the rider. At one instant he would crouch, as if to lie down, and then bound up several feet in the air, with a toss up of his haunches that almost sent me over the head. At another he would spring from side to side, writhing and twisting like a fish, till the saddle seemed actually slipping away from his lithe body. Not only did I resist all these attacks, but vigorously continued to punish with whip and spur the entire time – a proceeding, I could easily see, he was not prepared for. At last, actually maddened with his inability to throw me, and enraged by my continuing to spur him, he broke away, and dashing headlong forward, rushed into the very thickest of the grove. Fortunately for me, the trees were either shrubs or of stunted growth, so that I had only to keep my saddle to escape danger; but suddenly emerging from this, he gained the open sward, and as if his passion became more furious as he indulged in it, he threw up his head, and struck out in full gallop. I had but time to see that he was heading for the great fosse of the boulevard, when we were already on its brink. A shout, and a cry of I know not what, came from the tower; but I heard nothing more. Mad as the maddened animal himself, perhaps at that moment just as indifferent to life, I dashed the spurs into his flanks, and over we went, lighting on the green sward as easily as a seagull on a wave. To all seeming, the terrible leap had somewhat sobered him; but on me it had produced the very opposite effect. I felt that I had gained the mastery, and resolved to use it. With unrelenting punishment,

then, I rode him forward, taking the country as it lay straight before me. The few fences which divided the great fields were too insignificant to be called leaps, and he took them in the 'sling' of his stretching gallop. He was now subdued, yielding to every turn of my wrist, and obeying every motive of my will like an instinct. It may read like a petty victory; but he who has ever experienced the triumph over an enraged and powerful horse, well knows that few sensations are more pleasurably exciting. High as is the excitement of being borne along in full speed, leaving village and spire, glen and river, bridge and mill behind you – now careering up the mountain-side, with the fresh breeze upon your brow; now diving into the dark forest, startling the hare from her cover, and sending the wild deer scampering before you – it is still increased by the sense of a victory; by feeling that the mastery is with you, and that each bound of the noble beast beneath you has its impulse in your own heart.

Although the cavalry squadrons I was despatched to overtake had quitted Nancy four hours before, I came up with them in less than an hour, and inquiring for the officer in command, rode up to the head of the division. He was a thin, gaunt-looking, stern-featured man, who listened to my message without changing a muscle.

'Who sent you with this order?' said he.

'A general officer, sir, whose name I don't know, but who told me to take his own horse and follow you.'

'Did he tell you to kill the animal, sir?' said he, pointing to the

heaving flanks and shaking tail of the exhausted beast.

‘He bolted with me at first, major, and having cleared the ditch of the boulevard, rode away with me.’

‘Why, it’s Colonel Mahon’s Arab, Aleppo,’ said another officer; ‘what could have persuaded him to mount an orderly on a beast worth ten thousand francs?’

I thought I’d have fainted, as I heard these words; the whole consequences of my act revealed themselves before me, and I saw arrest, trial, sentence, imprisonment, and Heaven knew what afterwards, like a panorama rolling out to my view.

‘Tell the colonel, sir,’ said the major, ‘that I have taken the north road, intending to cross over at Beaumont; that the artillery trains have cut up the Metz road so deeply, cavalry cannot travel; tell him I thank him much for his politeness in forwarding this despatch to me; and tell him, that I regret the rules of active service should prevent my sending back an escort to place yourself under arrest for the manner in which you have ridden – you hear, sir?’

I touched my cap in salute.

‘Are you certain, sir, that you have my answer correctly?’

‘I am, sir.’

‘Repeat it, then.’

I repeated the reply, word for word, as he spoke it.

‘No, sir,’ said he as I concluded; ‘I said for unsoldier-like and cruel treatment to your horse.’

One of his officers whispered something in his ear, and he

quietly added —

‘I find that I had not used these words, but I ought to have done so; give the message, therefore, as you heard it at first.’

‘Mahon will shoot him, to a certainty,’ muttered one of the captains.

‘I’d not blame him,’ joined another; ‘that horse saved his life at Quiberon, when he fell in with a patrol; and look at him now!’

The major made a sign for me to retire, and I turned and set out towards Nancy, with the feelings of a convict on the way to his fate.

If I did not feel that these brief records of a humble career were ‘upon honour,’ and that the only useful lesson a life so unimportant can teach, is the conflict between opposing influences, I might possibly be disposed to blink the avowal, that, as I rode along towards Nancy, a very great doubt occurred to me as to whether I ought not to desert! It is a very ignoble expression; but it must out. There were not in the French service any of those ignominious punishments which, once undergone, a man is dishonoured for ever, and no more admissible to rank with men of character than if convicted of actual crime; but there were marks of degradation, almost as severe, then in vogue, and which men dreaded with a fear nearly as acute — such, for instance, as being ordered for service at the Bagne de Brest, in Toulon — the arduous duty of guarding the galley-slaves, and which was scarcely a degree above the condition of the condemned themselves. Than such a fate as this, I would willingly

have preferred death. It was, then, this thought that suggested desertion; but I soon rejected the unworthy temptation, and held on my way towards Nancy.

Aleppo, if at first wearied by the severe burst, soon rallied, while he showed no traces of his fiery temper, and exhibited few of fatigue; and as I walked along at his side, washing his mouth and nostrils at each fountain I passed, and slackening his saddle-girths to give him freedom, long before we arrived at the suburbs he had regained all his looks and much of his spirit.

At last we entered Nancy about nightfall, and, with a failing heart, I found myself at the gate of the ducal palace. The sentries suffered me to pass unmolested, and entering, I took my way through the courtyard, towards the small gate of the garden, which, as I had left it, was unlatched.

It was strange enough, the nearer I drew towards the eventful moment of my fate, the more resolute and composed my heart became. It is possible, thought I, that in a fit of passion he will send a ball through me, as the officer said. Be it so – the matter is the sooner ended. If, however, he will condescend to listen to my explanation, I may be able to assert my innocence, at least so far as intention went. With this comforting conclusion, I descended at the stable door. Two dragoons in undress were smoking, as they lay at full length upon a bench, and speedily arose as I came up.

‘Tell the colonel he’s come, Jacques,’ said one, in a loud voice, and the other retired; while the speaker, turning towards me,

took the bridle from my hand, and led the animal in, without vouchsafing a word to me.

‘An active beast that,’ said I, affecting the easiest and coolest indifference. The soldier gave me a look of undisguised amazement, and I continued —

‘He has had a bad hand on him, I should say — some one too flurried and too fidgety to give confidence to a hot-tempered horse.’

Another stare was all the reply.

‘In a little time, and with a little patience, I’d make him as gentle as a lamb.’

‘I’m afraid you’ll not have the opportunity,’ replied he significantly; ‘but the colonel, I see, is waiting for you, and you can discuss the matter together.’

The other dragoon had just then returned, and made me a sign to follow him. A few paces brought us to the door of a small pavilion, at which a sentry stood; and having motioned to me to pass in, my guide left me. An orderly sergeant at the same instant appeared, and beckoning to me to advance, he drew aside a curtain, and pushing me forward, let the heavy folds close behind me; and now I found myself in a richly furnished chamber, at the farther end of which an officer was at supper with a young and handsome woman. The profusion of wax-lights on the table — the glitter of plate, and glass, and porcelain — the richness of the lady’s dress, which seemed like the costume of a ball — were all objects distracting enough, but they could

not turn me from the thought of my own condition; and I stood motionless, while the officer, a man of about fifty, with dark and stern features, deliberately scanned me from head to foot. Not a word did he speak, not a gesture did he make, but sat, with his black eyes actually piercing me. I would have given anything for some outbreak of anger, some burst of passion, that would have put an end to this horrible suspense, but none came; and there he remained several minutes, as if contemplating something too new and strange for utterance. 'This must have an end,' thought I – 'here goes'; and so, with my hand in salute, I drew myself full up, and said —

'I carried your orders, sir, and received for answer that Major Roquelard had taken the north road advisedly, as that by Beaumont was cut up by the artillery trains; that he would cross over to the Metz Chaussée as soon as possible; that he thanked you for the kindness of your warning, and regretted that the rules of active service precluded his despatching an escort of arrest along with me, for the manner in which I had ridden with the order.'

'Anything more?' asked the colonel, in a voice that sounded thick and guttural with passion.

'Nothing more, sir.'

'No further remark or observation?' 'None, sir – at least from the major.'

'What then – from any other?'

'A captain, sir, whose name I do not know, did say something.'

‘What was it?’

‘I forget the precise words, sir, but their purport was, that Colonel Mahon would certainly shoot me when I got back.’

‘And you replied?’

‘I don’t believe I made any reply at the time, sir.’

‘But you thought, sir – what were your thoughts?’

‘I thought it very like what I’d have done myself in a like case, although certain to be sorry for it afterwards.’

Whether the emotion had been one for some time previous restrained, or that my last words had provoked it suddenly, I cannot tell, but the lady here burst out into a fit of laughter, but which was as suddenly checked by some sharp observation of the colonel, whose stern features grew sterner and darker every moment.

‘There we differ, sir,’ said he, ‘for I should not’ At the same instant he pushed his plate away, to make room on the table for a small portfolio, opening which, he prepared to write.

‘You will bring this paper,’ continued he, ‘to the provost-marshal. To-morrow morning you shall be tried by a regimental court-martial, and as your sentence may probably be the galleys and hard labour – ’

‘I ‘ll save them the trouble,’ said I, quietly drawing my sword; but scarcely was it clear of the scabbard when a shriek broke from the lady, who possibly knew not the object of my act; at the same instant the colonel bounded across the chamber, and striking me a severe blow upon the arm, dashed the weapon from

my hand to the ground.

‘You want the fusillade – is that what you want?’ cried he, as, in a towering fit of passion, he dragged me forward to the light. I was now standing close to the table; the lady raised her eyes towards me, and at once broke out into a burst of laughter – such hearty, merry laughter, that, even with the fear of death before me, I could almost have joined in it.

‘What is it – what do you mean, Laure?’ cried the colonel angrily.

‘Don’t you see it?’ said she, still holding her kerchief to her face – ‘can’t you perceive it yourself? He has only one moustache!’

I turned hastily towards the mirror beside me, and there was the fatal fact revealed – one gallant curl disported proudly over the left cheek, while the other was left bare.

‘Is the fellow mad – a mountebank?’ said the colonel, whose anger was now at its white heat.

‘Neither, sir,’ said I, tearing off my remaining moustache, in shame and passion together. ‘Among my other misfortunes I have that of being young; and what’s worse, I was ashamed of it; but I begin to see my error, and know that a man may be old without gaining either in dignity or temper.’

With a stroke of his closed fist upon the table, the colonel made every glass and decanter spring from their places, while he uttered an oath that was only current in the days of that army. ‘This is beyond belief,’ cried he. ‘Come, *gredin*, you have at least had one piece of good fortune: you’ve fallen precisely into the

hands of one who can deal with you. – Your regiment?’

‘The Ninth Hussars.’

‘Your name?’

‘Tiernay.’

‘Tiernay; that’s not a French name?’

‘Not originally; we were Irish once.’

‘Irish,’ said he, in a different tone from what he had hitherto used. ‘Any relative of a certain Comte Maurice de Tiernay, who once served in the Royal Guard?’

‘His son, sir.’

‘What – his son! Art certain of this, lad? You remember your mother’s name then – what was it?’

‘I never knew which was my mother,’ said I. ‘Mademoiselle de la Lasterie or – ’

He did not suffer me to finish, but throwing his arms around my neck, pressed me to his bosom.

‘You are little Maurice, then,’ said he, ‘the son of my old and valued comrade! Only think of it, Laure – I was that boy’s godfather.’

Here was a sudden change in my fortunes; nor was it without a great effort that I could credit the reality of it, as I saw myself seated between the colonel and his fair companion, both of whom overwhelmed me with attention.

It turned out that Colonel Mahon had been a fellow-guardsman with my father, for whom he had ever preserved the warmest attachment. One of the few survivors of the Garde du

Corps, he had taken service with the Republic, and was already reputed as one of the most distinguished cavalry officers.

‘Strange enough, Maurice,’ said he to me, ‘there was something in your look and manner, as you spoke to me there, that recalled your poor father to my memory; and without knowing or suspecting why, I suffered you to bandy words with me, while at another moment I would have ordered you to be ironed and sent to prison.’

Of my mother, of whom I wished much to learn something, he would not speak, but adroitly changed the conversation to the subject of my own adventures, and these he made me recount from the beginning. If the lady enjoyed all the absurdities of my chequered fortune with a keen sense of the ridiculous, the colonel apparently could trace in them but so many resemblances to my father’s character, and constantly broke out into exclamations of ‘How like him!’ ‘Just what he would have done himself!’ ‘His own very words!’ ‘and so on.

It was only in a pause of the conversation, as the clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven, that I was aware of the lateness of the hour, and remembered that I should be on the punishment-roll the next morning for absence from quarters.

‘Never fret about that, Maurice – I’ll return your name as on a special service; and to have the benefit of truth on our side, you shall be named one of my orderlies, with the grade of corporal.’

‘Why not make him a sous-lieutenant?’ said the lady, in a half-whisper. ‘I’m sure he is better worth his epaulettes than any I have

seen on your staff.'

'Nay, nay,' muttered the colonel, 'the rules of the service forbid it. He'll win his spurs time enough, or I 'm much mistaken.'

While I thanked my new and kind patron for his goodness, I could not help saying that my heart was eagerly set upon the prospect of actual service; and that proud as I should be of his protection, I would rather merit it by my conduct than owe my advancement to favour.

'Which simply means that you are tired of Nancy, and riding drill, and want to see how men comport themselves where the manoeuvres are not arranged beforehand. Well, so far you are right, boy. I shall, in all likelihood, be stationed here for three or four months, during which you might have advanced a stage or so towards those epaulettes my fair friend desires to see upon your shoulders. You shall, therefore, be sent forward to your own corps. I'll write to the colonel to confirm the rank of corporal; the regiment is at present on the Moselle, and, if I mistake not, will soon be actively employed. Come to me to-morrow before noon, and be prepared to march with the first detachments that are sent forward.'

A cordial shake of the hand followed these words; and the lady having also vouchsafed me an equal token of her good-will, I took my leave, the happiest fellow that ever betook himself to quarters after hours, and as indifferent to the penalties annexed to the breach of discipline as if the whole code of martial law were a mere fable.

CHAPTER X. AN ARISTOCRATIC REPUBLICAN

If the worthy reader would wish to fancy the happiest of all youthful beings, let him imagine what I must have been, as, mounted upon Aleppo, a present from my godfather, with a purse of six shining louis in my pocket, and a letter to my colonel, I set forth for Metz. I had breakfasted with Colonel Mahon, who, amid much good advice for my future guidance, gave me, half slyly, to understand that the days of Jacobinism had almost run their course, and that a reactionary movement had already set in. The Republic, he added, was as strong, perhaps stronger, than ever, but that men had grown weary of mob tyranny, and were, day by day, reverting to the old loyalty, in respect for whatever pretended to culture, good-breeding, and superior intelligence. ‘As, in a shipwreck, the crew instinctively turn for counsel and direction to the officers, you will see that France will, notwithstanding all the libertinism of our age, place her confidence in the men who have been the tried and worthy servants of former governments. So far, then, from suffering on account of your gentle blood, Maurice, the time is not distant when it will do you good service, and when every association that links you with family and fortune will be deemed an additional guarantee of your good conduct. I mention these things,’ continued he, ‘because your colonel is

what they call a "Grosbleu " – that is, a coarse-minded, inveterate republican, detesting aristocracy and all that belongs to it. Take care, therefore, to give him no just cause for discontent, but be just as steady in maintaining your position as the descendant of a noble house, who has not forgotten what were once the privileges of his rank. Write to me frequently and freely, and I'll take care that you want for nothing, so far as my small means go, to sustain whatever grade you occupy. Your own conduct shall decide whether I ever desire to have any other inheritor than the son of my oldest friend in the world.'

Such were his last words to me as I set forth, in company with a large party, consisting for the most part of under-officers and employés attached to the medical staff of the army. It was a very joyous and merry fraternity, and, consisting of ingredients drawn from different pursuits and arms of the service, infinitely amusing from contrast of character and habits. My chief associate amongst them was a young sous-lieutenant of dragoons, whose age, scarcely much above my own, joined to a joyous, reckless temperament, soon pointed him out as the character to suit me; his name was Eugène Santron. In appearance he was slightly formed, and somewhat undersized, but with handsome features, their animation rendered sparkling by two of the wickedest black eyes that ever glistened and glittered in a human head. I soon saw that, under the mask of affected fraternity and equality, he nourished the most profound contempt for the greater number of associates, who, in truth,

were, however *braves gens*, the very roughest and least-polished specimens of the polite nation. In all his intercourse with them, Eugène affected the easiest tone of camaraderie and equality, never assuming in the slightest, nor making any pretensions to the least superiority on the score of position or acquirements, but on the whole consoling himself, as it were, by ‘playing them off’ in their several eccentricities, and rendering every trait of their vulgarity and ignorance tributary to his own amusement. Partly from seeing that he made me an exception to this practice, and partly from his perceiving the amusement it afforded me, we drew closer towards each other, and before many days elapsed, had become sworn friends.

There is probably no feature of character so very attractive to a young man as frankness. The most artful of all flatteries is that which addresses itself by candour, and seems at once to select, as it were by intuition, the object most suited for a confidence. Santron carried me by a *coup de main* of this kind, as, taking my arm one evening as I was strolling along the banks of the Moselle, he said —

‘My dear Maurice, it’s very easy to see that the society of our excellent friends yonder is just as distasteful to you as to me. One cannot always be satisfied laughing at their solecisms in breeding and propriety. One grows weary at last of ridiculing their thousand absurdities; and then there comes the terrible retribution in the reflection of what the devil brought me into such company? a question that, however easily answered, grows

more and more intolerable the oftener it is asked. To be sure, in my case there was little choice in the matter, for I was not in any way the arbiter of my own fortune. I saw myself converted from a royal page to a printer's devil by a kind old fellow, who saved my life by smearing my face with ink, and covering my scarlet uniform with a filthy blouse; and since that day I have taken the hint, and often found the lesson a good one – the dirtier the safer!

‘We were of the old nobility of France, but as the name of our family was the cause of its extinction, I took care to change it. I see you don’t clearly comprehend me, and so I’ll explain myself better. My father lived unmolested during the earlier days of the Revolution, and might so have continued to the end, if a detachment of the Garde Républicaine had not been despatched to our neighbourhood of Saarlouis, where it was supposed some lurking regard for royalty yet lingered. These fellows neither knew nor cared for the ancient noblesse of the country, and one evening a patrol of them stopped my father as he was taking his evening walk along the ramparts. He would scarcely deign to notice the insolent ‘*Qui va là?*’ of the sentry, a summons he at least thought superfluous in a town which had known his ancestry for eight or nine generations. At the repetition of the cry, accompanied by something that sounded ominous, in the sharp click of a gun-lock, he replied haughtily, “Je suis le Marquis de Saint-Trône.”

“There are no more marquises in France!” was the savage answer.

‘My father smiled contemptuously, and briefly said “Saint-Trône.”

“We have no saints either,” cried another.

“Be it so, my friend,” said he, with mingled pity and disgust. “I suppose some designation may at least be left to me, and that I may call myself Trône.”

“We are done with thrones long ago,” shouted they in chorus, “and we ‘ll finish you also.”

‘Ay, and they kept their word, too. They shot him that same evening, on very little other charge than his own name! If I have retained the old sound of my name, I have given it a more plebeian spelling, which is, perhaps, just as much of an alteration as any man need submit to for a period that will pass away so soon.’

‘How so, Eugène? you fancy the Republic will not endure in France. What, then, can replace it?’

‘Anything, everything; for the future all is possible. We have annihilated legitimacy, it is true, just as the Indians destroy a forest, by burning the trees; but the roots remain; and if the soil is incapable of sending up the giant stems as before, it is equally unable to furnish a new and different culture. Monarchy is just as firmly rooted in a Frenchman’s heart, but he will have neither patience for its tedious growth, nor can he submit to restore what has cost him so dearly to destroy. The consequences will, therefore, be a long and continued struggle between parties, each imposing upon the nation the form, of government that pleases

it in turn. Meanwhile you and I, and others like us, must serve whatever is uppermost – the cleverest fellow he who sees the coming change, and prepares to take advantage of it.’

‘Then you are a Royalist?’ asked I.

‘A Royalist! What! stand by a monarch who deserted his aristocracy, and forgot his own order; defend a throne that he had reduced to the condition of a *fauteuil de Bourgeois*?’

‘You are then for the Republic?’

‘For what robbed me of my inheritance – what degraded me from my rank, and reduced me to a state below that of my own vassals! Is this a cause to uphold?’

‘You are satisfied with military glory, perhaps,’ said I, scarcely knowing what form of faith to attribute to him.

‘In an army where my superiors are the very dregs of the people; where the canaille have the command, and the chivalry of France is represented by a sans-culotte!’

‘The cause of the Church – ’

A hurst of ribald laughter cut me short, and laying his hand on my shoulder he looked me full in the face; while with a struggle to recover his gravity, he said —

‘I hope, my dear Maurice, you are not serious, and that you do not mean this for earnest. Why, my dear boy, don’t you talk of the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Delphic Oracle of Alchemy, Astrology – of anything, in short, of which the world, having amused itself, has at length grown weary? Can’t you see that the Church has passed away, and these good priests have gone

the same road as their predecessors? Is any acuteness wanting to show that there is an end of this superstition that has enthralled men's minds for a couple of thousand years? No, no, their game is up, and for ever. These pious men, who despised this world, and yet had no other hold upon the minds of others than by the very craft and subtlety that world taught them – these heavenly souls, whose whole machinations revolved about earthy objects and the successes of this grovelling planet! Fight for them! No, *parbleu!* we owe them but little love or affection. Their whole aim in life has been to disgust one with whatever is enjoyable, and the best boon they have conferred upon humanity, that bright thought of locking up the softest eyes and fairest cheeks of France in cloisters and nunneries! I can forgive our glorious Revolution much of its wrong when I think of the Prêtre; not but that they could have knocked down the church without suffering the ruins to crush the château!’

Such, in brief, were the opinions my companion held, and of which I was accustomed to hear specimens every day; at first, with displeasure and repugnance; later on, with more of toleration; and at last, with a sense of amusement at the singularity of the notions, or the dexterity with which he defended them. The poison of his doctrines was the more insidious, because it was mingled with a certain dash of good-nature, and a reckless, careless easiness of disposition always attractive to very young men. His reputation for courage, of which he had given signal proofs, elevated him in my esteem;

and, ere long, all my misgivings about him, in regard of certain blemishes, gave way before my admiration of his heroic bearing and a readiness to confront peril, wherever to be found.

I had made him the confidant of my own history, of which I told him everything, save the passages which related to the Père Michel. These I either entirely glossed over, or touched so lightly as to render unimportant – a dread of ridicule restraining me from any mention of those earlier scenes of my life, which were alone of all those I should have avowed with pride. Perhaps it was from mere accident – perhaps some secret shame to conceal my forlorn and destitute condition may have had its share in the motive; but, for some cause or other, I gave him to understand that my acquaintance with Colonel Mahon had dated back to a much earlier period than a few days before, and, the impression once made, a sense of false shame led me to support it.

‘Mahon can be a good friend to you,’ said Eugène; ‘he stands well with all parties. The Convention trust him, the sans-culottes are afraid of him, and the few men of family whom the guillotine has left look up to him as one of their stanchest adherents. Depend upon it, therefore, your promotion is safe enough, even if there were not a field open for every man who seeks the path to eminence. The great point, however, is to get service with the army of Italy. These campaigns here are as barren and profitless as the soil they are fought over; but, in the south, Maurice, in the land of dark eyes and tresses, under the blue skies, or beneath the trellised vines, there are rewards of victory more glorious than a

grateful country, as they call it, ever bestowed. Never forget, my boy, that you or I have no cause! It is to us a matter of indifference what party triumphs, or who is uppermost. The Government may change to-morrow, and the day after, and so on for a month long, and yet we remain just as we were. Monarchy, Commonwealth, Democracy – what you will – may rule the hour, but the sous-lieutenant is but the servant who changes his master. Now, in revenge for all this, we have one compensation, which is, to “live for the day” – to make the most of that brief hour of sunshine granted us, and to taste of every pleasure, to mingle in every dissipation, and enjoy every excitement that we can. This is my philosophy, Maurice, and just try it.’

Such was the companion with whom chance threw me in contact, and I grieve to think how rapidly his influence gained the mastery over me.

CHAPTER XI. 'THE PASSAGE OF THE RHINE'

I parted from my friend Eugène at Treves, where he remained in garrison, while I was sent forward to Coblenz to join my regiment, at that time forming part of Ney's division.

Were I to adhere in my narrative to the broad current of great events, I should here have to speak of that grand scheme of tactics by which Kléber, advancing from the Lower Rhine, engaged the attention of the Austrian Grand-Duke, in order to give time and opportunity for Hoche's passage of the river at Strasbourg, and the commencement of that campaign which had for its object the subjugation of Germany. I have not, however, the pretension to chronicle those passages which history has for ever made memorable, even were my own share in them of a more distinguished character. The insignificance of my station must, therefore, be my apology if I turn from the description of great and eventful incidents to the humble narrative of my own career.

Whatever the contents of Colonel Mahon's letter, they did not plead very favourably for me with Colonel Hacque, my new commanding officer; neither, to all seeming, did my own appearance weigh anything in my favour. Raising his eyes at intervals from the letter to stare at me, he uttered some broken

phrases of discontent and displeasure; at last he said – ‘What’s the object of this letter, sir; to what end have you presented it to me?’

‘As I am ignorant of its contents, mon colonel,’ said I calmly, ‘I can scarcely answer the question.’

‘Well, sir, it informs me that you are the son of a certain Count Tiernay, who has long since paid the price of his nobility; and that, being an especial protégé of the writer, he takes occasion to present you to me; now I ask again, with what object?’

‘I presume, sir, to obtain for me the honour which I now enjoy – to become personally known to you.’

‘I know every soldier under my command, sir,’ said he rebukingly, ‘as you will soon learn if you remain in my regiment. I have no need of recommendatory letters on that score. As to your grade of corporal, it is not confirmed; time enough when your services shall have shown that you deserve promotion. *Parbleu!* sir, you’ll have to show other claims than your ci-devant countship.’

Colonel Mahon gave me a horse, sir; may I be permitted to retain him as a regimental mount?’ asked I timidly.

‘We want horses – what is he like?’

‘Three-quarters Arab, and splendid in action, sir.’

‘Then, of course, unfit for service and field manoeuvres.

Send him to the état-major. The Republic will find a fitting mount for you; you may retire.’

And I did retire, with a heart almost bursting between anger and disappointment. What a future did this opening present to

me! What a realisation this of all my flattering hopes!

This sudden reverse of fortune, for it was nothing less, did not render me more disposed to make the best of my new condition, nor see in the most pleasing light the rough and rude fraternity among which I was thrown. The Ninth Hussars were reputed to be an excellent service-corps, but, off duty, contained some of the worst ingredients of the army. Play, and its consequence, duelling, filled up every hour not devoted to regimental duty; and low as the tone of manners and morals stood in the service generally, 'Hacque's Tapageurs,' as they were called, enjoyed the unflattering distinction of being the leaders. Self-respect was a quality utterly unknown amongst them – none felt ashamed at the disgrace of punishment; and as all knew that, at the approach of the enemy, prison-doors would open, and handcuffs fall off, they affected to think the 'Salle de Police' was a pleasant alternative to the fatigue and worry of duty. These habits not only stripped soldiering of all its chivalry, but robbed freedom itself of all its nobility. These men saw nothing but licentiousness in their newly won liberty. Their 'Equality' was the permission to bring everything down to a base and unworthy standard; their 'Fraternity,' the appropriation of what belonged to one richer than themselves.

It would give me little pleasure to recount, and the reader, in all likelihood, as little to hear, the details of my life among such associates. They are the passages of my history most painful to recall, and least worthy of being remembered; nor can I even

yet write without shame the confession, how rapidly their habits became my own. Eugene's teachings had prepared me, in a manner, for their lessons. His scepticism, extending to everything and every one, had made me distrustful of all friendship, and suspicious of whatever appeared a kindness. Vulgar association, and daily intimacy with coarsely minded men, soon finished what he had begun; and in less time than it took me to break my troop-horse to regimental drill, I had been myself 'broke in' to every vice and abandoned habit of my companions. It was not in my nature to do things by halves; and thus I became, and in a brief space, too, the most inveterate Tapageur of the whole regiment. There was not a wild prank or plot in which I was not foremost, not a breach of discipline unaccompanied by my name or presence, and more than half the time of our march to meet the enemy, I passed in double irons under the guard of the provost-marshal.

It was at this pleasant stage of my education that our brigade arrived at Strasbourg, as part of the *corps d'armée*, under the command of General Moreau.

He had just succeeded to the command on the dismissal of Pichegru, and found the army not only dispirited by the defeats of the past campaign, but in a state of rudest indiscipline and disorganisation. If left to himself, he would have trusted much to time and circumstances for the reform of abuses that had been the growth of many months long. But Régnier, the second in command, was made of 'different stuff'; he was a harsh and stern

disciplinarian, who rarely forgave a first, never a second, offence, and who, deeming the 'Salle de Police' as an encumbrance to an army on service, which, besides, required a guard of picked men, that might be better employed elsewhere, usually gave the preference to the shorter sentence of 'four paces and a fusillade.' Nor was he particular in the classification of those crimes he thus expiated: from the most trivial excess to the wildest scheme of insubordination, all came under the one category. More than once, as we drew near to Strasbourg, I heard the project of a mutiny discussed, day after day. Some one or other would denounce the '*scélérat* Régnier,' and proclaim his readiness to be the executioner; but the closer we drew to headquarters, the more hushed and subdued became these mutterings, till at last they ceased altogether, and a dark and foreboding dread succeeded to all our late boastings and denunciations.

This at first surprised and then utterly disgusted me with my companions. Brave as they were before the enemy, had they no courage for their own countrymen? Was all their valour the offspring of security, or could they only be rebellious when the penalty had no terrors for them? Alas! I was very young, and did not then know that men are never strong against the right, and that a bad cause is always a weak one.

It was about the middle of June when we reached Strasbourg, where now about forty thousand troops were assembled. I shall not readily forget the mingled astonishment and disappointment our appearance excited as the regiment entered the town. The

Tapageurs, so celebrated for all their terrible excesses and insubordination, were seen to be a fine corps of soldierlike fellows, their horses in high condition, their equipments and arms in the very best order. Neither did our conduct at all tally with the reputation that preceded us. All was orderly and regular in the several billets; the parade was particularly observed; not a man late at the night muster. What was the cause of this sudden and remarkable change? Some said that we were marching against the enemy; but the real explanation lay in the few words of a general order read to us by our colonel the day before we entered the city: —

‘The 9th Hussars have obtained the unworthy reputation of being an ill-disciplined and ill-conducted regiment, relying upon their soldierlike qualities in face of the enemy to cover the disgrace of their misconduct in quarters. This is a mistake that must be corrected. All Frenchmen are brave; none can arrogate to themselves any prerogative of valour. If any wish to establish such a belief, a campaign can always attest it. If any profess to think so without such proof, and, acting in conformity with this impression, disobey their orders or infringe regimental discipline, I will have them shot.

‘Régnier, Adjutant-General.’

This was, at least, a very straightforward and intelligible announcement, and as such my comrades generally acknowledged it. I, however, regarded it as a piece of monstrous and intolerable tyranny, and sought to make converts to my

opinion by declaiming about the rights of Frenchmen, the liberty of free discussion, the glorious privilege of equality, and so on; but these arguments sounded faint in presence of the drumhead; and while some slunk away from the circle around me, others significantly hinted that they would accept no part of the danger my doctrines might originate.

However I might have respected my comrades had they been always the well-disciplined body I now saw them, I confess that this sudden conversion through fear was in nowise to my taste, and rashly confounded their dread of punishment with a base and ignoble fear of death. ‘And these are the men,’ thought I, ‘who talk of their charging home through the dense squares of Austria – who have hunted the leopard into the sea, and have carried the flag of France over the high Alps?’

A bold rebel, whatever may be the cause against which he revolts, will always be sure of a certain ascendancy. Men are prone to attribute power to pretension, and he who stands foremost in the breach will at least win the suffrages of those whose cause he assumes to defend. In this way it happened that exactly, as my comrades fell in my esteem, I was elevated in theirs; and while I took a very depreciating estimate of their courage, they conceived a very exalted opinion of mine.

It was altogether inexplicable to see these men, many of them the bronzed veterans of a dozen campaigns – the wounded and distinguished soldiers in many a hard-fought field, yielding up their opinions and sacrificing their convictions to a raw and

untried stripling who had never yet seen an enemy.

With a certain fluency of speech I possessed also a readiness at picking up information, and arraying the scattered fragments of news into a certain consistence, which greatly imposed upon my comrades. A quick eye for manoeuvres, and a shrewd habit of combining in my own mind the various facts that came before me, made me appear to them a perfect authority on military matters, of which I talked, I shame to say, with all the confidence and presumption of an accomplished general. A few lucky guesses, and a few half hints, accidentally confirmed, completed all that was wanting; and what says 'Le Jeune Maurice,' was the inevitable question that followed each piece of flying gossip, or every rumour that rose of a projected movement.

I have seen a good deal of the world since that time, and I am bound to confess, that not a few of the great reputations I have witnessed have stood upon grounds very similar, and not a whit more stable than my own. A bold face, a ready tongue, a promptness to support, with my right hand, whatever my lips were pledged to, and, above all, good-luck, made me the king of my company; and although that sovereignty only extended to half a squadron of hussars, it was a whole universe to me.

So stood matters when, on the 23rd of June, orders came for the whole *corps d'armée* to hold itself in readiness for a forward movement. Rations for two days were distributed, and ammunition given out as if for an attack of some duration. Meanwhile, to obviate any suspicion of our intentions, the gates

of Strasbourg, on the eastern side, were closed – all egress in that direction forbidden – and couriers and *estafettes* sent off towards the north, as if to provide for the march of our force in that direction. The arrival of various orderly dragoons during the previous night, and on that morning early, told of a great attack in force on Mannheim, about sixty miles lower down the Rhine, and the cannonade of which some avowed that they could hear at that distance. The rumour, therefore, seemed confirmed, that we were ordered to move to the north, to support this assault.

The secret despatch of a few dismounted dragoons and some riflemen to the banks of the Rhine, however, did not strike me as according with this view, and particularly as I saw that, although all were equipped, and in readiness to move, the order to march was not given, a delay very unlikely to be incurred if we were destined to act as the reserve of the force already engaged.

Directly opposite to us, on the right bank of the river, and separated from it by a low flat of about two miles in extent, stood the fortress of Kehl, at that time garrisoned by a strong Austrian force; the banks of the river, and the wooded islands in the stream, which communicated with the right by bridges, or fordable passes, being also held by the enemy in force.

These we had often seen, by the aid of telescopes, from the towers and spires of Strasbourg; and now I remarked that the general and his staff seemed more than usually intent on observing their movements. This fact, coupled with the not less significant one that no preparations for a defence of Strasbourg

were in progress, convinced me that, instead of moving down the Rhine to the attack on Mannheim, the plan of our general was to cross the river where we were, and make a dash at the fortress of Kehl. I was soon to receive the confirmation of my suspicion, as the orders came for two squadrons of the 9th to proceed, dismounted, to the bank of the Rhine, and, under shelter of the willows, to conceal themselves there. Taking possession of the various skiffs and fishing-boats along the bank, we were distributed in small parties, to one of which, consisting of eight men under the orders of a corporal, I belonged.

About an hour's march brought us to the river-side, in a little clump of alder willows, where, moored to a stake, lay a fishing-boat with two short oars in her. Lying down beneath the shade, for the afternoon was hot and sultry, some of us smoked, some chatted, and a few dozed away the hours that somehow seemed unusually slow in passing.

There was a certain dogged sullenness about my companions, which proceeded from their belief that we and all who remained at Strasbourg were merely left to occupy the enemy's attention, while greater operations were to be carried on elsewhere.

'You see what it is to be a condemned corps,' muttered one; 'it's little matter what befalls the old 9th, even should they be cut to pieces.'

'They didn't think so at Enghien,' said another, 'when we rode down the Austrian cuirassiers.'

'Plain enough,' cried a third, 'we are to have skirmishers' duty

here, without skirmishers' fortune in having a force to fall back upon.'

'Eh! Maurice, is not this very like what you predicted for us?' broke in a fourth ironically.

'I'm of the same mind still,' rejoined I coolly: 'the general is not thinking of a retreat; he has no intention of deserting a well-garrisoned, well-provisioned fortress. Let the attack on Mannheim have what success it may, Strasbourg will be held still. I overheard Colonel Guyon remark that the waters of the Rhine have fallen three feet since the drought set in, and Régnier replied 'that we must lose no time, for there will come rain and floods ere long.' Now what could that mean but the intention to cross over yonder?'

'Cross the Rhine in face of the fort of Kehl!' broke in the corporal.

'The French army have done bolder things before now!' was my reply; and, whatever the opinion of my comrades, the flattery ranged them on my side. Perhaps the corporal felt it beneath his dignity to discuss tactics with an inferior, or perhaps he felt unable to refute the specious pretensions I advanced; in any case he turned away, and either slept, or affected sleep, while I strenuously laboured to convince my companions that my surmise was correct.

I repeated all my former arguments about the decrease in the Rhine, showing that the river was scarcely two-thirds of its habitual breadth, that the nights were now dark, and well

suiting for a surprise, that the columns which issued from the town took their departure with a pomp and parade far more likely to attract the enemy's attention than escape his notice, and were, therefore, the more likely to be destined for some secret expedition, of which all this display was but the blind. These, and similar facts, I grouped together with a certain ingenuity, which, if it failed to convince, at least silenced my opponents. And now the brief twilight, if so short a struggle between day and darkness deserved the name, passed off, and night suddenly closed around us – a night black and starless, for a heavy mass of lowering cloud seemed to unite with the dense vapour that arose from the river, and the low-lying grounds alongside of it. The air was hot and sultry, too, like the precursor of a thunderstorm, and the rush of the stream as it washed among the willows sounded preternaturally loud.

A hazy, indistinct flame, the watch-fire of the enemy, on the island of Eslar, was the only object visible in the murky darkness. After a while, however, we could detect another fire on a smaller island, a short distance higher up the stream. This, at first dim and uncertain, blazed up after a while, and at length we descried the dark shadows of men as they stood around it.

It was but the day before that I had been looking on a map of the Rhine, and remarked to myself that this small island, little more than a mere rock in the stream, was so situated as to command the bridge between Eslar and the German bank, and I could not help wondering that the Austrians had never taken

the precaution to strengthen it, or at least place a gun there, to enfilade the bridge. Now, to my extreme astonishment, I saw it occupied by the soldiery, who, doubtless, were artillery, as in such a position small arms would prove of slight efficiency. As I reflected over this, wondering within myself if any intimation of our movements could have reached the enemy, I heard along the ground on which I was lying the peculiar tremulous, dull sound communicated by a large body of men marching. The measured tramp could not be mistaken, and as I listened I could perceive that a force was moving towards the river from different quarters. The rumbling roll of heavy guns and the clattering noise of cavalry were also easily distinguished, and awaking one of my comrades I called his attention to the sounds.

'Parbleu!' said he, 'thou'rt right; they're going to make a dash at the fortress, and there will be hot work ere morning. What say you now, corporal? has Maurice hit it off this time?'

'That's as it may be,' growled the other sulkily; 'guessing is easy work ever for such as thee! but if he be so clever, let him tell us why are we stationed along the river's bank in small detachments. We have had no orders to observe the enemy, nor to report upon anything that might go forward; nor do I see with what object we were to secure the fishing-boats; troops could never be conveyed across the Rhine in skiffs like these!'

'I think that this order was given to prevent any of the fishermen giving information to the enemy in case of a sudden attack,' replied I.

‘Mayhap thou wert at the council of war when the plan was decided on,’ said he contemptuously. ‘For a fellow that never saw the smoke of an enemy’s gun, thou hast a rare audacity in talking of war!’

‘Yonder is the best answer to your taunt,’ said I, as, in a little bend of the stream beside us, two boats were seen to pull under the shelter of the tall alders, from which the clank of arms could be plainly heard; and now another larger launch swept past, the dark shadows of a dense crowd of men showing above the gunwale.

‘They are embarking – they are certainly embarking,’ now ran from mouth to mouth. As the troops arrived at the river’s bank they were speedily ‘told off’ in separate divisions, of which some were to lead the attack, others to follow, and a third portion to remain as a reserve in the event of a repulse.

The leading boat was manned entirely by volunteers, and I could hear from where I lay the names called aloud as the men stepped out from the ranks. I could hear that the first point of attack was the island of Eslar. So far there was a confirmation of my own guessing, and I did not hesitate to assume the full credit of my skill from my comrades. In truth, they willingly conceded all or even more than I asked for. Not a stir was heard, not a sight seen, not a movement made of which I was not expected to tell the cause and the import; and knowing that to sustain my influence there was nothing for it but to affect a thorough acquaintance with everything, I answered all their

questions boldly and unhesitatingly. I need scarcely observe that the corporal in comparison sank into downright insignificance. He had already shown himself a false guide, and none asked his opinion further, and I became the ruling genius of the hour. The embarkation now went briskly forward; several light field-guns were placed in the boats, and two or three large rafts, capable of containing two companies each, were prepared to be towed across by boats.

Exactly as the heavy hammer of the cathedral struck one, the first boat emerged from the willows, and darting rapidly forward, headed for the middle of the stream; another and another in quick succession followed, and speedily were lost to us in the gloom; and now two four-oared skiffs stood out together, having a raft, with two guns, in tow; by some mischance, however, they got entangled in a side current, and the raft swerving to one side, swept past the boats, carrying them down the stream along with it. Our attention was not suffered to dwell on this mishap, for at the same moment the flash and rattle of firearms told us the battle had begun. Two or three isolated shots were first heard, and then a sharp platoon-fire, accompanied by a wild cheer, that we well knew came from our own fellows. One deep mellow boom of a large gun resounded amidst the crash, and a slight streak of flame, higher up the stream, showed that the shot came from the small island I have already spoken of.

‘Listen, lads,’ said I; ‘that came from the “Fels Insel.” If they are firing grape yonder, our poor fellows in the boats will suffer

sorely from it. By Jove, there is a crash!

As I was speaking, a rattling noise like the sound of clattering timber was heard, and with it a sharp, shrill cry of agony, and all was hushed.

‘Let’s at them, boys: they can’t be much above our own number. The island is a mere rock,’ cried I to my comrades.

‘Who commands this party,’ said the corporal – ‘you or I?’

‘You, if you lead us against the enemy,’ said I; ‘but I’ll take it if my comrades will follow me. There goes another shot, lads – yes or no – now is the time to speak.’

‘We’re ready,’ cried three, springing forward with one impulse.

At the instant I jumped into the skiff, the others took their places, and then come a fourth, a fifth, a sixth, and a seventh, leaving the corporal alone on the bank.

‘Come along, corporal,’ cried I, ‘we’ll win your epaulettes for you’; but he turned away without a word; and, not waiting further, I pushed out the skiff, and sent her skimming down the stream.

‘Pull steady, boys, and silently,’ said I; ‘we must gain the middle of the current, and then drop down the river without the least noise. Once beneath the trees, we’ll give them a volley, and then the bayonet. Remember, lads, no flinching; it’s as well to die here as be shot by old Régnier to-morrow.’

The conflict on the Eslar island was now, to all seeming, at its height. The roll of musketry was incessant, and sheets of flame, from time to time, streaked the darkness above the river.

‘Stronger and together, boys – once more – there it is – we are in the current now; in with you, men, and look to your carbines; see that the priming is safe; every shot soon will be worth a fusillade. Lie still now, and wait for the word to fire.’

The spreading foliage of the nut-trees was rustling over our heads as I spoke, and the sharp skiff, borne on the current, glided smoothly on till her bow struck the rock. With high-beating hearts we clambered up the little cliff, and, as we reached the top, beheld immediately beneath us, in a slight dip of the ground, several figures around a gun, which they were busy adjusting. I looked right and left to see that my little party were all assembled, and without waiting for more, gave the order – fire!

We were within pistol range, and the discharge was a deadly one. The terror, however, was not less complete; for all who escaped death fled from the spot, and dashing through the brushwood, made for the shallow part of the stream, between the island and the right bank.

Our prize was a brass eight-pounder, and an ample supply of ammunition. The gun was pointed towards the middle of the stream, where the current being strongest, the boats would necessarily be delayed; and in all likelihood some of our gallant comrades had already experienced its fatal fire. To wheel it right about, and point it on the Eslar bridge, was the work of a couple of minutes; and while three of our little party kept up a steady fire on the retreating enemy, the others loaded the gun and prepared to fire.

Our distance from the Eslar island and bridge, as well as I could judge from the darkness, might be about two hundred and fifty yards, and, as we had the advantage of a slight elevation of ground, our position was admirable.

‘Wait patiently, lads,’ said I, restraining, with difficulty, the burning ardour of my men. ‘Wait patiently, till the retreat has commenced over the bridge. The work is too hot to last much longer on the island; to fire upon them there would be to risk our own men as much as the enemy. See what long flashes of flame break forth among the brushwood; and listen to the cheering now. That was a French cheer! – and there goes another. Look! – look, the bridge is darkening already! That was a bugle-call, and they are in full retreat. Now, lads – now!’

As I spoke, the gun exploded, and the instant after we heard the crashing rattle of the timber, as the shot struck the bridge, and splintered the wood-work in all directions.

‘The range is perfect, lads,’ cried I. ‘Load and fire with all speed.’

Another shot, followed by a terrific scream from the bridge, told how the work was doing. Oh! the savage exultation, the fiendish joy of my heart, as I drank in that cry of agony, and called upon my men to load faster.

Six shots were poured in with tremendous precision and effect, and the seventh tore away one of the main supports of the bridge, and down went the densely crowded column into the Rhine. At the same instant the guns of our launches opened a

destructive fire upon the banks, which soon were swept clean of the enemy.

High up on the stream, and for nearly a mile below also, we could see the boats of our army pulling in for shore; the crossing of the Rhine had been effected, and we now prepared to follow.

CHAPTER XII. 'A GLANCE AT STAFF-DUTY'

Although the passage of the Rhine was but the prelude to the attack on the fortress, that exploit being accomplished, Kehl was carried at the point of the bayonet, the French troops entering the outworks pell-mell with the retreating enemy, and in less than two hours after the landing of our first detachments, the tricolour waved over the walls of the fortress.

Lost amid the greater and more important successes which since that time have immortalised the glory of the French arms, it is almost impossible to credit the celebrity attached at that time to this brilliant achievement, whose highest merits probably were rapidity and resolution. Moreau had long been jealous of the fame of his great rival, Bonaparte, whose tactics, rejecting the colder dictates of prudent strategy, and the slow progress of scientific manouvres, seemed to place all his confidence in the sudden inspirations of his genius, and the indomitable bravery of his troops. It was necessary, then, to raise the morale of the army of the Rhine, to accomplish some great feat similar in boldness and heroism to the wonderful achievements of the Italian army. Such was the passage of the Rhine at Strasbourg, effected in the face of a great enemy, advantageously posted, and supported by one of the strongest of all the frontier fortresses.

The morning broke upon us in all the exultation of our triumph, and as our cheers rose high over the field of the late struggle, each heart beat proudly with the thought of how that news would be received in Paris.

‘You ‘ll see how the bulletin will spoil all,’ said a young officer of the army of Italy, as he was getting his wound dressed on the field. ‘There will be such a long narrative of irrelevant matter – such details of this, that, and t’ other – that the public will scarce know whether the placard announces a defeat or a victory.’

‘*Parbleu!*’ replied an old veteran of the Rhine army, ‘what would you have? You’d not desire to omit the military facts of such an exploit?’

‘To be sure I would,’ rejoined the other. ‘Give me one of our young general’s bulletins, short, stirring, and effective: – “Soldiers! you have crossed the Rhine against an army double your own in numbers and munitions of war. You have carried a fortress, believed impregnable, at the bayonet. Already the great flag of our nation waves over the citadel you have won. Forward, then, and cease not till it floats over the cities of conquered Germany, and let the name of France be that of Empire over the continent of Europe.”’

‘Ha! I like that, cried I enthusiastically; ‘that’s the bulletin to my fancy. Repeat it once more, mon lieutenant, that I may write it in my note-book.’

‘What! hast thou a note-book?’ cried an old staff-officer, who was preparing to mount his horse; ‘let’s see it, lad.’

With a burning cheek and trembling hand I drew my little journal from the breast of my jacket, and gave it to him.

'Sacrebleu!' exclaimed he, in a burst of laughter, 'what have we here? Why, this is a portrait of old General Moricier, and although a caricature, a perfect likeness. And here comes a plan for manoeuvring a squadron by threes from the left. This is better – it is a receipt for an "Omelette à la Hussard"; and here we have a love-song, and a moustache-paste, with some hints about devotion, and diseased frog in horses. Most versatile genius, certainly!' And so he went on, occasionally laughing at my rude sketches and ruder remarks, till he came to a page headed 'Equitation, as practised by Officers of the Staff,' and followed by a series of caricatures of bad riding, in all its moods and tenses. The flush of anger which instantly coloured his face soon attracted the notice of those about him, and one of the bystanders quickly snatched the book from his fingers, and, in the midst of a group all convulsed with laughter, proceeded to expatiate upon my illustrations. To be sure, they were absurd enough. Some were represented sketching on horseback, under shelter of an umbrella; others were 'taking the depth of a stream' by a 'header' from their own saddles; some again were 'exploring ground for an attack in line,' by a measurement of the rider's own length over the head of his horse. Then there were ridiculous situations, such as 'sitting down before a fortress,' 'taking an angle of incidence,' and so on. Sorry jests all of them, but sufficient to amuse those with whose daily associations they chimed in,

and to whom certain traits of portraiture gave all the zest of a personality.

My shame at the exposure, and my terror for its consequences, gradually yielded to a feeling of flattered vanity at the success of my lucubrations; and I never remarked that the staff-officer had ridden away from the group till I saw him galloping back at the top of his speed.

‘Is your name Tiernay, my good fellow?’ cried he, riding close up to my side, and with an expression on his features I did not half like.

‘Yes, sir,’ replied I.

‘Hussar of the Ninth, I believe?’ repeated he, reading from a paper in his hand.

‘The same, sir.’

‘Well, your talents as a draughtsman have procured you promotion, my friend; I have obtained your discharge from your regiment, and you are now my orderly – orderly on the staff, do you mind; so mount, sir, and follow me.’

I saluted him respectfully, and prepared to obey his orders. Already I foresaw the downfall of all the hopes I had been cherishing, and anticipated the life of tyranny and oppression that lay before me. It was clear to me that my discharge had been obtained solely as a means of punishing me, and that Captain Discau, as the officer was called, had destined me to a pleasant expiation of my note-book. The savage exultation with which he watched me, as I made up my kit and saddled my horse – the

cool malice with which he handed me back the accursed journal, the cause of all my disasters – gave me a dark foreboding of what was to follow; and as I mounted my saddle, my woeful face and miserable look brought forth a perfect shout of laughter from the bystanders.

Captain Discau's duty was to visit the banks of the Rhine and the Eslar island, to take certain measurements of distances, and obtain accurate information on various minute points respecting the late engagement; for, while a brief announcement of the victory would suffice for the bulletin, a detailed narrative of the event in all its bearings must be drawn up for the minister of war, and for this latter purpose various staff-officers were then employed in different parts of the field.

As we issued from the fortress, and took our way over the plain, we struck out into a sharp gallop; but as we drew near the river, our passage became so obstructed by lines of baggage-waggons, tumbrils, and ammunition-carts, that we were obliged to dismount and proceed on foot; and now I was to see for the first time that dreadful picture which, on the day after a battle, forms the reverse of the great medal of glory. Huge litters of wounded men, on their way back to Strasbourg, were drawn by six or eight horses, their jolting motion increasing the agony of sufferings that found their vent in terrific cries and screams; oaths, yells, and blasphemies, the ravings of madness, and the wild shouts of infuriated suffering, filled the air on every side. As if to give the force of contrast to this uproar of misery, two

regiments of Swabian infantry marched past as prisoners. Silent, crest-fallen, and wretched-looking, they never raised their eyes from the ground, but moved, or halted, wheeled, or stood at ease, as though by some impulse of mechanism; a cord coupled the wrists of the outer files one with another, which struck me less as a measure of security against escape, than as a mark of indignity.

Carts and charrettes with wounded officers, in which oftentimes the uniform of the enemy appeared side by side with our own, followed in long procession; and thus were these two great currents – the one hurrying forward, ardent, high-hearted, and enthusiastic; the other returning maimed, shattered, and dying!

It was an affecting scene to see the hurried gestures, and hear the few words of adieu, as they passed each other. Old comrades who were never to meet again, parted with a little motion of the hand; sometimes a mere look was all their leave-taking, save when, now and then, a halt would for a few seconds bring the lines together, and then many a bronzed and rugged cheek was pressed upon the faces of the dying, and many a tear fell from eyes bloodshot with the fury of the battle! Wending our way on foot slowly along, we at last reached the river-side, and having secured a small skiff, made for the Eslar island – our first business being to ascertain some details respecting the intrenchments there, and the depth and strength of the stream between it and the left bank. Discau, who was a distinguished officer, rapidly possessed himself of the principal facts he wanted, and then, having given

me his portfolio, he seated himself under the shelter of a broken waggon, and opening a napkin, began his breakfast off a portion of a chicken and some bread-viands which, I own, more than once made my lips water as I watched him.

‘You’ve eaten nothing to-day, Tiernay?’ asked he, as he wiped his lips with the air of a man that feels satisfied.

‘Nothing, *mon capitaine*?’ replied I.

‘That’s bad,’ said he, shaking his head; ‘a soldier cannot do his duty if his rations be neglected. I have always maintained the principle: Look to the men’s necessities – take care of their food and clothing. Is there anything on that bone there?’

‘Nothing, *mon capitaine*.’

‘I’m sorry for it – I meant it for you. Put up that bread, and the remainder of that flask of wine. Bourdeaux is not to be had every day. We shall want it for supper, Tiernay.’

I did as I was bid, wondering not a little why he said ‘we,’ seeing how little a share I occupied in the copartnery.

‘Always be careful of the morrow on a campaign, Tiernay – no squandering, no waste; that’s one of my principles,’ said he gravely, as he watched me while I tied up the bread and wine in the napkin. ‘You’ll soon see the advantage of serving under an old soldier.’

I confess the great benefit had not already struck me, but I held my peace and waited; meanwhile he continued —

‘I have studied my profession from my boyhood, and one thing I have acquired that all experience has confirmed – the

knowledge that men must neither be taxed beyond their ability nor their endurance. A French soldier, after all, is human; eh, isn't not so?"

"I feel it most profoundly, *mon capitaine*," replied I, with my hand on my empty stomach.

"Just so," rejoined he; "every man of sense and discretion must confess it. Happily for you, too, I know it; ay, Tiernay I know it, and practise it. When a young fellow has acquitted himself to my satisfaction during the day – not that I mean to say that the performance has not its fair share of activity and zeal – when evening comes and stable duty finished, arms burnished, and accoutrements cleaned, what do you think I say to him? – eh, Tiernay – just guess now?"

"Probably, sir, you tell him he is free to spend an hour at the canteen, or take his sweetheart to the theatre."

"What! more fatigue! more exhaustion to an already tired and worn-out nature!"

"I ask pardon, sir, I see I was wrong; but I had forgotten how thoroughly the poor fellow was done up. I now see that you told him to go to bed."

"To bed! to bed! Is it that he might writhe in the nightmare, or suffer agony from cramps? To bed after fatigue like this! No, no, Tiernay; that was not the school in which I was brought up; we were taught to think of the men under our command; to remember that they had wants, sympathies, hopes, fears, and emotions like our own. I tell him to seat himself at the table, and

with pen, ink, and paper before him, to write up the blanks. I see you don't quite understand me, Tiernay, as to the meaning of the phrase, but I'll let you into the secret. You have been kind enough to give me a peep at your note-book, and you shall in return have a look at mine. Open that volume, and tell me what you find in it.'

I obeyed the direction, and read at the top of a page the words, 'Skeleton, 5th Prarial,' in large characters, followed by several isolated words, denoting the strength of a brigade, the number of guns in a battery, the depth of a fosse, the height of a parapet, and such like. These were usually followed by a flourish of the pen, or sometimes by the word 'Bom.,' which singular monosyllable always occurred at the foot of the pages.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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