

# HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

NO SURRENDER! A TALE  
OF THE RISING IN LA  
VENDEE

George Henty

**No Surrender! A Tale of  
the Rising in La Vendee**

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# **G. A. Henty**

## **No Surrender! A Tale of the Rising in La Vendee**

### **Preface**

In the world's history, there is no more striking example of heroic bravery and firmness than that afforded by the people of the province of Poitou, and more especially of that portion of it known as La Vendee, in the defence of their religion and their rights as free men. At the commencement of the struggle they were almost unarmed, and the subsequent battles were fought by the aid of muskets and cannon wrested from the enemy. With the exception of its forests, La Vendee offered no natural advantages for defence. It had no mountains, such as those which enabled the Swiss to maintain their independence; no rivers which would bar the advance of an enemy; and although the woods and thickets of the Bocage, as it was called, favoured the action of the irregular troops, these do not seem to have been utilized as they might have been, the principal engagements of the war being fought on open ground. For eighteen months the peasants of La Vendee, in spite of the fact that they had no idea of submitting either to drill or discipline, repulsed the efforts of forces commanded by the best generals France could furnish; and which grew, after every defeat, until at length armies numbering, in all, over two hundred thousand men were collected to crush La Vendee.

The losses on both sides were enormous. La Vendee was almost depopulated; and the Republicans paid dearly, indeed, for their triumph, no fewer than one hundred thousand men having fallen, on their side. La Vendee was crushed, but never surrendered. Had the British government been properly informed, by its agents, of the desperate nature of the struggle that was going on; they might, by throwing twenty thousand troops, with supplies of stores and money into La Vendee, have changed the whole course of events; have crushed the Republic, given France a monarch, and thus spared Europe over twenty years of devastating warfare, the expenditure of enormous sums of money, and the loss of millions of lives.

*G. A. Henty*

## Chapter 1: A French Lugger

Some half a mile back from the sea, near the point where the low line of sandy hill is broken by the entrance into Poole Harbour, stood, in 1791, Netherstock; which, with a small estate around, was the property of Squire Stansfield. The view was an extensive one, when the weather was clear. Away to the left lay the pine forests of Bournemouth and Christ Church and, still farther seaward, the cliffs of the Isle of Wight, from Totland Bay as far as Saint Catherine Point. Close at hand to the south was Studland Bay, bounded by Handfast Point. Looking towards the right was a great sheet of shallow water, for the most part dry at low tide, known as Poole and Wareham Harbours, with its numerous creeks and bays.

Netherstock was an old house, with many nooks and corners. The squire was a justice of the peace but, unless there was some special business on, he seldom took his place on the bench. He was a jovial man, who took life easily. He was popular among his neighbours, especially among the poorer classes; for whom he had always a pleasant word, as he rode along; and who, in case of illness, knew that they could always be sure of a supply of soup, or a gill of brandy at Netherstock.

Among those of his own class it was often a matter of wonder how James Stansfield made both ends meet. The family had, for two or three generations, been of a similar temperament to that of the present holder; men who spent their money freely, and were sure to be present whenever there was a horse race, or a main of cocks to be fought, or a prizefight to come off, within a day's ride of Netherstock. Gradually, farm after farm had been parted with; and the estate now was smaller, by half, than it had been at the beginning of the century.

James Stansfield had, however, done nothing further to diminish it. He had a large family, but they could hardly be said to be an expensive one, seeing that little was spent upon the fashion of their clothes; and beyond the fact that the curate in charge of the little church in the village of Netherstock came over, every morning for two or three hours, to give the boys and girls the elements of education, they went very much their own way. Mrs. Stansfield had died, five years before this. Polly, the eldest girl, aged twenty, acted as mistress of the house. Next to her, at intervals of little more than a year, came Ralph and John; two strongly built young fellows, both fearless riders and good at all rustic games. What supervision the farm work got was given by them.

Patsey, the second girl, was generally admitted to be the flower of the Stansfields. She was bright, pretty, and good tempered. She was in charge of the dairy, and the Netherstock butter was famous through the country round, and always fetched top prices at the market. The youngest of the family was Leigh, who was now fourteen. He was less heavily built than his brothers, but their tutor declared that he was the quickest and most intelligent of his pupils; and that, if he had but a chance, he would turn out a fine young fellow.

The boys were all fond of boating and sailing, which was natural enough, as the sea washed two sides of the estate. They had two boats. One of these lay hauled up on the sands, a mile to the east of the entrance to the harbour. She was a good sea boat and, when work was slack about the place, which indeed was the normal state of things, they would often sail to Weymouth to the west, or eastward to Yarmouth or Lymington, sometimes even to Portsmouth. The other boat, which was also large, but of very shallow draught of water, lay inside the entrance to the harbour; and in her they could go either north or south of Brownsea Island, and shoot or fish in the many inlets and bays. There were few who knew every foot of the great sheet of water as they did, and they could tell the precise time of the tide at which the channels were deep enough for boats drawing from two to three feet of water.

The most frequent visitor to Netherstock was Lieutenant, or, as he was called in courtesy, Captain Whittier, the officer in command of the coast guard station between Poole and Christ Church; his principal station being opposite Brownsea Island, the narrowest point of the entrance to the

harbour. He was a somewhat fussy little officer, with a great idea of the importance of his duties, mingled with a regret that these duties did not afford him full scope for proving his ability.

"Smuggling has almost ceased to exist, along here," he would say. "I do not say that, across the harbour, something that way may not still be done; for the facilities there are very much greater than they are on this side. Still, my colleague there can have but little trouble; for I keep a sharp lookout that no boat enters by the passage south of the island without being searched. Of course, one hears all sorts of absurd reports about cargoes being run; but we know better, and I believe they are only set on foot to put our officers from Swanage Westward, and beyond Christ Church down to Hurst Castle, off their guard."

"No doubt, captain; no doubt," James Stansfield would agree. "Still, I fancy that, although times are not what they were, it is still possible to buy a keg of brandy, occasionally, or a few yards of silk or lace, that have never paid duty."

"Yes, no doubt occasionally some small craft manages to run a few kegs or bales; and unfortunately the gentry, instead of aiding his majesty's representatives, keep the thing alive by purchasing spirits, and so on, from those who have been concerned in their landing."

"Well, you know, Captain Whittier, human nature is pretty strong. If a pedlar comes along here with ribbons and fal-lals, and offers them to the girls at half the price at which they could buy them down at Poole, you can hardly expect them to take lofty ground, and charge the man with having smuggled them."

"I do not think the young ladies are offenders that way," the officer said, "for I have never yet seen them in foreign gear of any sort. I should, if you will allow me to say so, be more inclined, were you not a justice of the peace, to suspect you of having dealings with these men; for your brandy is generally of the best."

"I don't set up to be better than my neighbours, captain," the squire said, with a laugh; "and if the chance comes my way, I will not say that I should refuse to buy a good article, at the price I should pay for a bad one in the town."

"Your tobacco is good, too, squire."

"Yes, I am particular about my tobacco, and I must say that I think government lays too high a duty on it. If I had the making of the laws, I would put a high duty on bad tobacco, and a low duty on a good article; that would encourage the importation of good wholesome stuff."

"I suppose you have heard no rumours of any suspicious looking craft being heard of, off the coast?"

"No, I think that they carry on their business a good deal farther to the west now. My post is becoming quite a sinecure. The Henriette came into Poole this morning, but we never trouble about her. She is a fair trader, and is well known at every port between Portsmouth and Plymouth as such. She always comes in at daylight, and lays her foresail aback till we board her, and send a couple of men with her into Poole or Wareham. Her cargo is always consigned to well-known merchants, at all the ports she enters; and consists of wines, for the most part, though she does occasionally bring in brandy."

"He is a fine young fellow, the skipper, Jean Martin. I believe his father is a large wine merchant, at Nantes. I suppose you know him, squire?"

"Yes, I have met him several times down in the town, and indeed have bought many a barrel of wine of him. He has been up here more than once, for I have told him, whenever he has anything particularly good either in wine or spirits, to let me know. He talks a little English, and my girls like to have a chat with him, about what is going on on his side of the water. He offered, the other day, to give Leigh a trip across to Nantes, if I was willing."

"Things seem to be going on very badly in Paris, by what he says; but he does not anticipate any troubles in the west of France, where there seems to be none of that ill feeling, between the different classes, that there is in other parts."

The departure of Captain Whittier was always followed by a broad smile on the faces of the elder boys, breaking occasionally into a hearty laugh, in which the squire joined.

"I call him an insufferable ass," Ralph said, on this particular evening. "It would be difficult, as father says, to find an officer who is, as far as we are concerned, so admirably suited for his position."

"That is so, Ralph. There is scarcely a man, woman, or child in this part of Dorsetshire who does not know that there are more goods run, on that piece of water over there, than on the whole south coast of England. I sincerely trust that nothing will ever bring about his recall. Personally, I would pay two or three hundred a year, out of my own pocket, rather than lose him. There is no such place anywhere for the work; why, there are some fourteen or fifteen inlets where goods can be landed at high water and, once past the island, I don't care how sharp the revenue men may be, the betting is fifty to one against their being at the right spot at the right time.

"If the passage between our point and the island were but a bit wider, it would be perfect; but unfortunately it is so narrow that it is only on the very darkest night one can hope to get through, unnoticed. However, we can do very well with the southern channel and, after all, it is safer. We can get any number of boats, and the *Henriette* has only to anchor half a mile outside the entrance. We know when she is coming, and have but to show a light, directly she makes her signal, and the boats will put out from Radhorn passage and Hamworth; while messengers start for Bushaw, and Scopland, and Creach, and a dozen farmhouses, and the carts are sure to be at the spot where they had been warned to assemble, by the time the boats come along with the kegs; and everything is miles away, in hiding, before morning.

"If it is a dark night the *Henriette* makes off again, and comes boldly in the next afternoon. If one of the revenue boats, either from here or Studland, happens to come across her before she gets up anchor, there she is—the crew are all asleep, with the exception of a man on watch; she is simply waiting to come in, when there is light enough to enable her to make her way up the passage."

James Stansfield was, in fact, the organizer of the smuggling business carried on at Poole, and the adjacent harbours. There was not a farmhouse, among the hills to the south of the great sheet of water, with which he was not in communication. Winter was the season at which the trade was most busy, for the short summer nights were altogether unsuited for the work; and when the cold weather drove the wildfowl in for shelter, there was splendid shooting, and Ralph and John were able to combine amusement with business, and to keep the larder well stocked.

The night signals were made from a cleft in the sand hills, half a mile from the house; the light being so arranged that it could not be seen from Brownsea Island, though visible to those on the south side, from Studland right away over the hills to Corfe Castle, even to Wareham. It was shown but for half a minute, just as the bells of Poole Church struck nine. At that hour, when the lugger was expected, there was a lookout at the door of every farmhouse and, the moment the light was seen, preparations were made for the landing at the spot of which notice had been given, by one or other of the boys, on the previous day. Then, from quiet little inlets, the boats would put off noiselessly, directly there was water to float them; for it was only at high tides that the shallows were covered. They would gather in the channel south of Brownsea, where the boys and often their father would be in their boats in readiness, until a momentary glimmer of a light, so placed on board the lugger that it could only be seen from the spot where they were awaiting it, showed the position of the craft and their readiness to discharge cargo.

It was exciting work, and profitable; and so well was it managed that, although it had been carried on for some years, no suspicion had ever entered the minds of any of the revenue officers. Sometimes many weeks would elapse between the visits of the lugger, for she was obliged to make her appearance frequently at other ports, to maintain her character as a trader; and was, as such, well known all along the coast.

It was only a year since the *Henriette* had taken the place of another lugger, that had previously carried on the work, but had been wrecked on the French coast. She had been the property of the same



owner, or rather of the same firm; for Jean Martin, who had been first mate on board the other craft, had invested some of his own money in the *Henriette*, and assumed the command. It was noticed, at Poole, that the *Henriette* used that port more frequently than her predecessor had done; and indeed, she not infrequently came in, in the daytime, with her hold as full as when she had left Nantes.

It was on one of these occasions that Jean Martin, on coming up to Netherstock, had a long talk with the squire.

"So you want my daughter Patsey?" the latter said, when his visitor had told his story. "Well, it has certainly never entered my mind that any of my girls should marry a Frenchman. I don't say that I have not heard my boys making a sly joke, more than once, when the *Henriette* was seen coming in, and I have seen the colour flying up into the girl's face; but I only looked at it as boys' nonsense. Still, I don't say that I am averse to your suit. We may be said to be partners, in this trade of yours, and we both owe each other a good deal. During the last eight years you must have run something like forty cargoes, and never lost a keg or a bale; and I doubt if as much could be said for any other craft in the trade.

"Still, one can't calculate on always being lucky. I don't think anyone would turn traitor, when the whole countryside is interested in the matter; and I wouldn't give much for the life of anyone who whispered as much as a word to the revenue people. Still, accidents will take place sometimes. Your father must have done well with the trade, and so have I.

"At any rate, I will leave it in Patsey's hands. I have enough of them, and to spare. And of course, you will be able to bring her over, sometimes, to pay us a visit here.

"I think, too, that your offer of taking Leigh over with you helps to decide me in your favour. They are all growing up and, if anything were to put a stop to our business, this place would not keep them all; and it would be a great thing, for Patsey, to have her brother as a companion when you are away. The boy would learn French, and in your father's business would get such a knowledge of the trade with Nantes as should serve him in good stead. At any rate, he will learn things that are a good deal more useful to him than those he gets from the curate.

"Well, you know you will find her in the dairy, as usual. You had better go and see what she says to it."

It is probable that Jean Martin had already a shrewd idea of what Patsey's answer would be, and he presently returned to her father, radiant. Patsey, indeed, had given her heart to the cheery young sailor; and although it seemed to her a terrible thing, that she should go to settle in France, she had the less objection to it, inasmuch as the fear that the smuggling would be sooner or later discovered, and that ruin might fall upon Netherstock, was ever present in her mind, and in that of her elder sister.

To her brothers, engaged in the perilous business, it was regarded as a pleasant excitement, without which their lives would be intolerably dull. It was not that she or they regarded the matter in the light of a crime, for almost everyone on that part of the coast looked upon smuggling as a game, in which the wits of those concerned in it were pitted against those of the revenue men. It brought profit to all concerned, and although many of the gentry found it convenient to express indignation, at the damage done to the king's revenue by smuggling; there were none of them who thought it necessary to mention, to the coast guard, when by some accident a keg of brandy, or a parcel with a few pounds of prime tobacco, was found in one of the outhouses.

Patsey had suffered more than her sister, being of a more lively imagination, and being filled with alarm and anxiety whenever she knew that her father and the boys were away at night. Then, too, she was very fond of Leigh, and had built many castles in the air as to his future; and the thought that, not only would he be with her, but would be in the way of making his road to fortune, was very pleasant to her. She knew that if he remained at Netherstock he would grow up like his brothers. His father might, from time to time, talk of putting him into some business; but she understood his ways, and was certain that nothing would come of it.

Martin had, before, expressed to her his doubt as to whether her father would consent to her going away with him; but she had no fear on the subject. In his quiet, easygoing way he was fond of his children; and would scarcely put himself out to oppose, vehemently, anything on which they had set their hearts. He had, too, more than once said that he wished some of them could be settled elsewhere; for a time of trouble might come, and it would be well to have other homes, where some of them could be received.

"Patsey has consented," Jean Martin said, joyously, as he rejoined the squire.

"Well, that is all right. I think, myself, that it is for the best. Of course, it must be understood that, in the matter of religion, she is not to be forced or urged in any sort of way; but is to be allowed to follow the religion in which she has been brought up."

"I would in no way press her, sir. We have Protestants in France, just as there are Catholics here; though I must admit that there are not many of them in La Vendee. Still, the days when people quarrelled about religion are long since past; and certainly at Nantes there is a Protestant congregation, though away in the country they would be difficult to find. However, I promise you, solemnly, that I will in no way try to influence her mind, nor that of the boy. He will still, of course, look upon England as his home, and I should even oppose any attempt being made to induce him to join our church. You have plenty of Frenchmen in this country, and no question as to their religion arises. It will be just the same, with us."

Six weeks later, the Henriette returned. In her came Monsieur Martin, whose presence as a witness of the ceremony was considered advisable, if not absolutely necessary. He had, too, various documents to sign in presence of the French consul, at Southampton, giving his formal consent. The marriage was solemnized there at a small Catholic chapel, and it was repeated at the parish church at Poole, and the next day the party sailed for Nantes.

It was two months before the lugger again came in to Poole. When it returned, it took with it the squire and Polly, to whom Monsieur Martin had given a warm invitation to come over to see Patsey, in her new home.

They found her well and happy. Monsieur Martin's house was in the suburbs of Nantes. It had a large garden, at the end of which, facing another street, stood a pretty little house that had been generally used, either as the abode of aged mothers or unmarried sisters of the family, or for an eldest son to take his wife to; but which had now been handed over to Jean and his wife. This was very pleasant for Patsey, as it united the privacy of a separate abode with the cheerfulness of the family home. She had her own servant, whose excellent cooking and, above all, whose scrupulous cleanliness and tidiness, astonished her after the rough meals and haphazard arrangements at Netherstock.

Whenever she felt dull during Jean's absences, she could run across the garden for a talk with his mother and sister; at meals and in the evening she had Leigh, who spent most of his time at the cellars or in the counting house of Monsieur Martin; learning for the first time habits of business, and applying himself eagerly to acquiring the language.

The squire was put up at Monsieur Martin's, and Polly slept in the one spare room at her sister's, all the party from the pavilion going over to the house, to the midday meal and supper. The squire and Polly were much pleased with their visit. It was evident that Patsey had become a prime favourite with her husband's family. Jean's sister Louise was assiduous in teaching her French, and she had already begun to make some progress. Louise and her mother were constantly running across to the little pavilion, on some errand or other; and Patsey spent as much of her time with them as she did in her own house.

Jean's absences seldom exceeded ten days, and he generally spent a week at home before sailing again. He had driven her over to stay, for three or four days, at a small estate of his own, some forty miles to the southeast of Nantes, in the heart of what was called the Bocage—a wild country, with thick woods, narrow lanes, high hedges, and scattered villages and farms, much more English in appearance than the country round Nantes. The estate had come to him from an aunt. Everything here was very

interesting to Patsey; the costumes of the women and children, the instruments of husbandry, the air of freedom and independence of the people, and the absence of all ceremony, interested and pleased her. She did not understand a single word of the patois spoken to her by the peasants, and which even Jean had some difficulty in following, although he had spent a good deal of his time at the little chateau during the lifetime of his aunt.

"Should you like to live here, when not at sea, Jean?" asked Patsey.

"Yes, I would rather live here than at Nantes. Next to a life at sea, I should like one quite in the country. There is plenty to do here. There is the work on the place to look after, there is shooting, there is visiting, and visiting here means something hearty, and not like the formal work in the town. Here no one troubles his head over politics. They may quarrel as they like, in Paris, but it does not concern La Vendee.

"Here the peasants love their masters, and the masters do all in their power for the comfort and happiness of the peasants. It is not as in many other parts of France, where the peasants hate the nobles, and the nobles regard the peasants as dirt under their feet. Here it is more like what I believe it was in England, when you had your troubles, and the tenants followed their lords to battle. At any rate, life here would be very preferable to being in business with my father, in Nantes. I should never have settled down to that; and as my elder brother seems specially made for that sort of life, fortunately I was able to go my own way, to take to the sea in the lugger, and become the carrier of the firm, while taking my share in the general profits."

"How is it that your brother does not live at home? It would seem natural that he should have had the pavilion, when he married."

"He likes going his own way," Jean said shortly. "As far as business matters go, he and my father are as one; but in other matters they differ widely. Jacques is always talking of reforms and changes, while my father is quite content with things as they are. Jacques has his own circle of friends, and would like to go to Paris as a deputy, and to mix himself up in affairs.

"Though none of us cared for the lady that he chose as his wife, she had money, and there was nothing to say against her, personally. None of us ever took to her, and there was a general feeling of relief when it was known that Jacques had taken a house in the business quarter.

"He looks after the carrying business. Of course, my lugger does but a very small proportion of it. We send up large quantities of brandy to Tours, Orleans, and other towns on the Loire; and have dealings with Brittany and Normandy, by sea, and with the Gironde. He looks after that part of the business. My father does the buying and directs the counting house. Though my art is a very inferior one, I have no reason to complain of my share of the profits."

The first eighteen months of Patsey's married life passed quietly and happily. She could now speak French fluently and, having made several stays at the country chateau, could make herself understood in the patois. Leigh spoke French as well as English. Fortunately he had picked up a little before leaving home, partly from his tutor, partly from endeavouring to talk with French fishermen and sailors who came into Poole. He frequently made trips in the Henriette, sometimes to Havre and Rouen, at others to Bordeaux. He had grown much, and was now a very strong, active lad. He got on very well with Monsieur Martin; but kept as much apart as he could from his eldest son, for whom he felt a deep personal dislike, and who had always disapproved of Jean's marriage to an Englishwoman.

Jacques Martin was the strongest contrast to his brother. He was methodical and sententious, expressed his opinion on all subjects with the air of a man whose judgment was infallible, and was an ardent disciple of Voltaire and Rousseau. It was very seldom that he entered his father's house, where his opinions on religious subjects shocked and horrified his mother and sister. He lived with an entirely different set, and spent most of his time at the clubs which, in imitation of those of Paris, had sprung up all over the country.

"What is all the excitement about, Jean?" Leigh asked his brother-in-law, one evening. "There are always fellows standing on casks or bales of timber along the wharf, shouting and waving their

arms about and, sometimes, reading letters or printed papers; and then those who listen to them shout and throw up their caps, and get into a tremendous state of excitement."

"They are telling the others what is being done at the Assembly."

"And what are they doing there, Jean?"

"They are turning things upside down."

"And is that good?"

"Well, there is no doubt that things are not as well managed as they might be, and that there is a great deal of distress and misery. In some parts of France the taxation has been very heavy, and the extravagance of the court has excited an immense deal of anger. It is not the fault of the present king, who is a quiet fellow, and does not care for show or pageants; but it is rather the fault of the kings who preceded him, especially of Louis the Fourteenth—who was a great monarch, no doubt, but a very expensive one to his subjects, and whose wars cost an enormous sum.

"You see it is not, in France, as it is with you. The nobles here have great power. Their tenants and serfs—for they are still nothing but serfs—are at the mercy of their lords, who may flog them and throw them into prison, almost at their pleasure; and will grind the last sou out of them, that they may cut a good figure at court.

"In this part of France things are more as they are in England. The nobles and seigneurs are like your country gentlemen. They live in their chateaux, they mix with their people and take an interest in them, they go to their fetes, and the ladies visit the sick, and in all respects they live as do your country squires; paying a visit for a few weeks each year to Paris, and spending the rest of their time on their estates. But it is not from the country that the members of the Assembly who are the most urgent for reforms and violent in their speech come, but from the towns. There were two writers, Voltaire and Rousseau, who have done enormous mischief. Both of them perceived that the state of things was wrong; but they went to extremes, made fun of the church, and attacked institutions of all sorts. Their writings are read by everyone, and have shaken people's faith in God, and in all things as they are.

"I do not say that much improvement could not be made, but it will never be made by sudden and great changes, nor by men such as those who are gradually gaining the upper hand in the Assembly. The people ought to have a much stronger voice than they have in their own taxation. They see that, in England, the ministers and parliament manage everything; and that the king—although his influence goes for a good deal, and he can change his ministers as often as he likes—must yet bow to the voice of parliament. I think that that is reasonable; but when it comes to a parliament composed largely of mere agitators and spouters, I, for my part, would rather be ruled by a king."

"But what is it that these people want, Jean?"

"I do not think they know in the least, themselves, beyond the fact that they want all the power; that they want to destroy the nobility, overthrow the church, and lay hands on the property of all who are more wealthy than themselves. Naturally the lowest classes of the towns, who are altogether ignorant, believe that by supporting these men, and by pulling down all above them, it would no longer be necessary to work. They want to divide the estates of the nobles, take a share of the wealth of the traders, and of the better class of all sorts; in fact they would turn everything topsy-turvy, render the poor all powerful, and tread all that is good and noble under their feet. The consequence is that the king is virtually a prisoner in the hands of the mob of Paris, the nobles and better classes are leaving the country, thousands of these have already been massacred, and no one can say how matters will end.

"Here in Nantes there is, as you see, a feeling of excitement and unrest; and though as yet there has been no violence, no one could venture to predict what may take place, if the moderate men in the Assembly are outvoted by the extremists, and all power falls into the hands of the latter. But I still hope that common sense will prevail, in the long run. I regard the present as a temporary madness, and trust that France will come to her senses, and that we shall have the satisfaction of seeing the scoundrels, who are now the leaders of the mob of Paris, receive the punishment they deserve.

"However, as far as we are concerned I have no uneasiness for, if troubles break out at Nantes, we can retire to my chateau, in the thickest and most wooded part of La Vendee, where there is no fear that the peasants will ever rise against their masters."

## Chapter 2: The Beginning Of Troubles

"Things are getting more and more serious, Patsey," said Jean one evening. "I don't know what will come of it. The excitement is spreading here, and there can be no doubt that there will be very serious troubles, ere long. The greater portion of the people here are with the Assembly, and approve of all these decrees against the priests, and the persecution of the better classes. You know what has taken place in Paris, and I fear that it will be repeated here.

"We are split up. My father, dear good man, thinks that he has only to attend to his business, and to express no opinion whatever about public affairs, and that the storm will pass quietly over his head. My brother has thrown himself heart and soul—that is to say, as far as he has a heart to throw—into what he calls the cause of the people; and which I consider to be the cause of revolution, of confiscation, of irreligion, and abomination generally.

"I am told that my name has freely been mentioned, in his club, as that of a dangerous man, with opinions contrary to the public good. I hear, too, that that brother of mine was there, at the time; and that he got up and said that in a case like this his voice must be silent, that true patriots place their country before all things; and then affected to speak mildly in my favour, but at the same time doing me as much harm as he could. I believe the fellow is capable of denouncing his own father.

"From the Bocage I hear that the whole country is in confusion. The people, of course, side with their priests. The nobles and land owners are naturally royalists, and are furious that the king should be held in what is practically subjection; by men of low degree, and who, although they may have some virtuous men among them, have also sanguinary scoundrels who gradually gain in power, and will soon be supreme.

"They, however, can do nothing at present. The peasants know nothing about the king, to them he is a mere name; but this persecution of their priests angers them greatly; and if, as is said, orders have been given to raise an army, and to drag men away from their homes whether they like to go or not, you may be sure that, ere long, there will be trouble there.

"Now you see, dear, I am a sort of double character. At sea I am Captain Jean Martin, a peaceful trader with, as you know, but little regard for the revenue laws of your country. On the other hand, in La Vendee I am Monsieur Jean Martin, a landed proprietor, and on friendly terms with all the nobles and gentry in my neighbourhood. It is evident that I cannot continue to play this double part. Already great numbers of arrests have been made here, and the prisons are half full. I hear that a commissioner from the Assembly is expected here shortly, to try these suspects, as they are called; and from what we know already, we may be sure that there will be little mercy shown.

"They are almost all people of substance; and the people, as they call themselves, are on principle opposed to men of substance. Now, if I remain here, I have no doubt that I shall be denounced in a very short time; and to be denounced is to be thrown into prison, and to be thrown into prison is equivalent to being murdered. I have no doubt, Patsey, that you would share my fate. The fact that you are an Englishwoman was among the accusations brought against me, in the club; and although, so far as I can see, the majority of these scoundrels have no religion whatever, they venture to make it a matter of complaint that you are a Protestant.

"I have seen this coming on for some time, and must now make my choice; either I must take you and the child over to England, and leave you there with your father until these troubles are over, while I must myself go down and look after my tenantry, and bear my share in whatever comes; or you must go down there with me."

"Certainly I will go down with you, Jean. It is your home, and whatever dangers may come I will share them with you. It would be agony to be in England, and to know nothing of what is passing here, and what danger might be threatening you. We took each other for better or worse, Jean, and the greater danger you may be in, the more it will be my duty to be by your side.

"I should be very happy down at the chateau. More happy than I have been here with you, for some time past; for one cannot but be very anxious, when one sees one's friends thrown into prison, and knows that you are opposed to all these things, and that it may be your turn next. Nothing would persuade me to leave you."

"Very well, wife, so be it. I am sure that there, at least, we shall be safe. It is only in the towns that these rascals are dangerous, and in a country like ours there is little fear that the knaves will venture to interfere, when they see that they are stirring up a nest of hornets. They have plenty of work to satisfy even their taste for confiscation and murder, in the large towns. There is an army gathering, on the frontier, and they will have their hands full, ere long."

"And now, about Leigh. My brother has always shown a dislike for him and, as it is certain that he cannot remain here, he must either return to England or go with us."

"I am sure that he would choose to go with us, Jean. You say yourself that he talks French like a native now, and although he has often told me that he would never settle in France—for naturally he is as horrified as I am with the doings in Paris, and the other great towns—still I am sure that he would choose to remain with us, now. You see, he is strong and active, and has made so many trips with you, that he is almost a sailor. He is within a few months of sixteen, and of late he has several times said to me that he would like to go some long voyages, and have some adventures, before settling down in business, in England, as an agent of your house."

"I should like to have him with us," Jean said heartily. "In the first place, he is a lad after my own heart, full of life and go, and already strong enough to take his own part; in the next place, although I hope for the best, a man can never say exactly what will take place. I may be away at times, and should be glad to know that you had a protector; and if he is willing to go, I shall be more than willing to have him."

"Then, too, it would be useful to have someone whom one could trust to carry messages. My idea is that I shall not leave the lugger here for, if I am denounced, it would certainly be seized. Pierre Lefaux, my mate, is a shrewd as well as a faithful fellow. I shall appoint him captain. I shall tell him to leave here, at once, and employ the lugger in coasting voyages; making Bordeaux his headquarters, and taking what freights he can get between that town and Rochelle, Brest, or other ports on this coast. So long as he does not return here, he might even take wines across to England, or brandy from Charente. He knows his business well and, as long as we are at peace with England, trade will still go on."

"The best thing would be for him to be at Bordeaux once every fortnight, or three weeks, so that we shall know where to find him. I have a great friend at Bordeaux, and shall get him to have the lugger registered in his name, and give him a receipt for her purchase money; so that in case the people here learn that she is trading at Bordeaux, he will be able to prove that she is his own property. Then, if the very worst should come, which I cannot bring myself to believe, there will be a means of escape for us all to England."

"She will be sailing there in two or three days. I have fifty thousand francs lying in my father's hands. I shall send that over by Lefaux, and instruct him to ask your father to go with him to the bank, at Poole, and pay the money in to my account. Then, if we should have to leave France, we shall have that to fall back upon, and the lugger. I should, of course, transfer her to the English flag, and have no doubt that we should be able to get on very fairly. So you see, I am preparing for all contingencies, Patsey."

"It seems very dreadful that the country should be in such a state, Jean."

"It is dreadful, and I am afraid that things have by no means got to the worst, yet."

"Ah, here comes Leigh! After supper I shall go in and have a talk with my father. I have very little hope of having much success with him; but at least, when he sees the steps that I am taking, it cannot but make him think seriously of his own position, and that of my mother and sisters."

Leigh was delighted when he heard Jean's proposal. His own position had been unpleasant, of late. He had long since ceased to go to Jacques Martin, for the dislike between them was mutual and, do what he would, he failed to give satisfaction. And of late, even in Monsieur Martin's cellars and storehouses, he had met with a good deal of unpleasantness; and would have met with more, had it not been that he had, on one occasion, knocked down one of the chief clerks, who had sworn at him for some trifling act of carelessness. As the clerk knew that the merchant would have been very angry at the insult he had offered to Leigh, he had not ventured to make a complaint; but in many ways he had been able to cause numberless petty annoyances. Many of the others were inclined to follow his lead, and would have done so more openly, were it not that they held in respect Leigh's strength, and readiness in the science they called *le boxe*.

The talk that there might be troubles in La Vendee heightened his satisfaction at leaving Nantes, and going down to stay in the country. The thought of a life spent at Poole, or Weymouth, as a wine merchant and agent of the house of Martin had, for some time past, been unpleasant to him. The feeling of general unrest that prevailed in France had communicated itself to him, and he thought possibly that something might occur which would change the current of his life, and lead to one more suited to his natural activity and energy.

"You had better pack up quietly, tomorrow," Jean said to his wife, after his return from his father's. "If there were any suspicion that I was thinking of going away, it might bring matters to a head. I will get the lugger's boat down to the wharf, and four sailors shall come up here and take the boxes down, in one of the hand carts, with a tarpaulin thrown over them. I will arrange for a cart and a carriage to be waiting for us, on the other side of the river.

"There is no moving my father. He cannot persuade himself that a man who takes no part in politics, and goes about his business quietly, can be in any danger. He has, however, at my mother's entreaty, agreed for the present to cease buying; and to diminish his stock as far as possible, and send the money, as fast as he realizes it, across to England. He says, too, that he will, if things get worse, send her and my sister to England. I promised him that your father would find them a house, and see that they were settled comfortably there, for a time. He would not believe that Jacques could have been at the club when I was denounced, without defending me; for although himself greatly opposed to the doings in Paris, and annoyed at the line Jacques has taken up, he thought that there was at least this advantage in it—that in case of troubles coming here, he would have sufficient influence to prevent our being in any way molested. However, there can be no question that I have, to some extent, alarmed him; and he agreed not only to draw, tomorrow, my fifty thousand francs from his *caisse*, but to send over with it a hundred thousand francs of his own. Fortunately he can do this without Jacques knowing anything about it, for although Jacques and I have both a share in the business, he has always kept the management of the money matters in his own hands.

"So that is settled, as far as it can be settled. Fortunately the club does not meet this evening, so there is no fear of a demand being made, by it, for my arrest tomorrow. I have a friend who belongs to it—not, I think, because he at all agrees with its views; but because, like many others, he deems it prudent to appear to do so. It was from him that I heard what had passed there, and he promised to give me warning of anything that might be said, or done, against me. I shall go down to the lugger early, and remain on board all day, seeing to the stowage of the cargo we are taking on board, so that no suspicion can arise that I am thinking of leaving for the country."

The next evening the party started by unfrequented streets for the quay, the nurse carrying the child, now three months old. The boxes had gone half an hour before. It was nearly ten o'clock, and the quays were deserted. Monsieur Martin had himself gone down, in the afternoon, with the money to the lugger, and handed it over to Jean, and had a long talk with him and Pierre Lefaux, to whom Jean had also intrusted letters from himself and Patsey, to the squire.

As soon as the party had taken their seats in the boat, it was rowed two miles up the river, to a point where there was a ferry across to a road, leading into the heart of La Vendee. Here a light



waggon and a carriage were waiting. The luggage was transferred to the former and, after a hearty farewell to Pierre Lefaux, who had himself come in charge of the boat, they started on their journey; and arrived at the chateau at nine o'clock in the morning, to the surprise of the man and woman in charge of it.

"Here we are safe," Jean said, as they alighted from the carriage. "It would take nothing short of an army to fight its way through these woods and lanes and, if the Assembly try to interfere with us, they will find it a much easier thing to pull down the throne of France, than to subdue La Vendee."

The news that the master had come down, and that he was going for a time to live among them, spread rapidly; and in the course of the day some fifteen of the tenants came in to pay their respects, few of them arriving without some little offering in the way of game, poultry, butter, or other produce.

"Our larder is full enough for us to stand a siege," Patsey said, laughing, "and I know that we have a good stock of wine in the cellar, Jean."

"Yes, and of cider, too. When the tenants are in any difficulty about paying their rents, I am always willing to take it out in wine or cider; for my father deals in both, and therefore it is as good as money. But I have not sent any to Nantes for the past two or three years and, as you say, the cellars are as full as they can hold.

"Tomorrow, Leigh, we will ride over and call upon some of our neighbours to hear the last news, for the Bocage is as far away from Nantes as if it were on the other side of France, and we hear only vague rumours of what is going on here."

The ride was a delightful one to Leigh. He had only once visited the chateau before, and then only for a day or two. The wild country, with its deep lanes, its thick high hedges, its woods and copses, was all new to him; for the country round his English home was, for the most part, bare and open. Some of the peasants carried guns over their shoulders, and looked as if accustomed to use them.

"Very few of them possess guns," Jean Martin remarked, "and that they should carry them shows how disturbed a state of mind all these people are in. They know that their priests may be arrested and carried off, at any moment; and no doubt the report that an order has been issued to raise thirty thousand men throughout France, and that every town and village has to furnish its quota, has stirred them up even more effectually. I don't suppose that many of them think that the authorities will really try to drag men off, against their will; but the possibility is quite enough to inflame their minds."

At the very first house they visited they received, from the owner, ample confirmation of Jean's views.

"There have been continual fracas between the peasants and the military," he said, "over the attempts of the latter to arrest the priests. They can scarcely be called fights, for it has not come to that; but as soon as the peasants hear that the gendarmes are coming, they send the priest into the wood, and gather in such force that the gendarmes are glad enough to ride away, unharmed. Of course, until we see that the peasants are really in earnest, and intend to fight to the last, it would be madness for any of us to take any part in the matter; for we should be risking not only life but the fortunes of our families, and maybe their lives, too. You must remember, moreover, that already a great number of the landed proprietors have either been murdered or imprisoned in Paris, or are fugitives beyond the frontier."

"If the peasants would fight," Jean Martin said, "it might not be a bad thing that there are so few whom they could regard as their natural leaders. If there are only a few leaders they may act together harmoniously, or each operate in his own district; but with a number of men of the same rank, or nearly of the same rank, each would have his own ideas as to what should be done, and there would be jealousy and discord."

"That is true," the other replied. "Of course, if this were an open country it would be necessary, to give us a chance of success, that some sort of discipline should be established; and none could persuade the peasants to submit to discipline, except their own lords. But in a country like this, discipline is of comparatively little importance; and it is well that it is so, for though I believe that the

peasants would fight to the death, rather than submit to be dragged away by force from their homes, they will never keep together for any time."

"I am afraid that that will be the case. We must hope that it will not come to fighting but, if it does, it will take a large force to conquer La Vendee."

"What has brought you down here, Monsieur Martin?"

"It was not safe for me to stay longer in Nantes. If I think a thing I say it, and as I don't think well of what is being done in Paris, I have not been in the habit of saying flattering things about the men there. In fact I have been denounced and, as there is still room for a few more in the prisons, I should have had a cell placed at my disposal, if I had remained there many more hours; so I thought that I should be safer, down here, till there was some change in the state of affairs."

"And you brought madame down with you?"

"Assuredly. I had only the choice open to me of sending her across to England, and of making my home there, or of coming here. If there had been no prospect of trouble here, I might have joined the army of our countrymen who are in exile; but as, from all I heard, La Vendee was ready to take up arms, I determined to come here; partly because, had I left the country, my estates here would have been confiscated; partly because I should like to strike a blow, myself, at these tyrants of Paris, who seem bent on destroying the whole of the aristocracy of France, of wiping out the middle classes, and dividing the land and all else among the scum of the towns."

Three or four months passed quietly. There were occasional skirmishes between the peasants, and parties of troops in search of priests who refused to obey the orders of the Assembly. At Nantes, the work of carrying out mock trials, and executing those of the better classes who had been swept into the prisons, went on steadily. From time to time a message came to Jean, from his father, saying that he had carried out his determination to lessen his stocks, and that he had sent considerable sums of money across the Channel. So far he had not been molested, but he saw that the public madness was increasing, and the passion for blood ever growing.

Then came the news of the execution of the king, which sent a thrill of horror through the loyal province. Shortly afterwards it was known that the decree for the raising of men was to be enforced; and that commissioners had already arrived at Saumur with a considerable force, that would be employed, if necessary; but that the process of drawing the names of those who were to go was to be carried out by the local authorities, assisted by the national guards of the towns.

During the winter things had gone on quietly, at the chateau. There had been but little visiting, for the terrible events passing in Paris, and in all the large towns, and the uncertainty about the future, had cast so deep a gloom over the country that none thought of pleasure, or even of cheerful intercourse with their neighbours. Many of the gentry, too, had given up all hope; and had made their way down to the coast, and succeeded in obtaining a passage in smuggling craft, or even in fishing boats, to England.

Jean Martin and Leigh had spent much of their time in shooting. Game was abundant and, as so many of the chateaux were shut up, they had a wide range of country open to them for sport. Once or twice they succeeded in bringing home a wild boar. Wolves had multiplied in the forests for, during the last three years, the regular hunts in which all the gentry took part had been abandoned, and the animals had grown fearless.

One day, soon after the news of the king's death had been received, Jean, who had ridden over to Saumur on business, brought back the news that war had been declared with England.

"It would have made a good deal of difference to me," he said, "if I had still been on board the lugger; for of course there would be an end to all legitimate trade. However, no doubt I should have managed to run a cargo, sometimes; for they will want brandy and tobacco all the more, when regular trade is at an end; and prices, you may be sure, will go up. I have no doubt, too, that there will be a brisk business in carrying emigrants over. Still, of course the danger would be very much

greater. Hitherto we have only had the revenue cutters and the coast guards to be afraid of, now every vessel of war would be an enemy."

As during their expeditions they were generally accompanied by half a dozen peasants, who acted as beaters, Leigh had come to understand the patois, and to some extent to speak it; and he often paid visits to the houses of the principal tenants of the estate, who not only welcomed him as the brother of their mistress, but soon came to like him for himself, and were amused by his high spirits, his readiness to be pleased with everything, and his talk to them of the little known country across the water.

It was evident, from the manner in which the drawing for the conscription was spoken of, that it would not be carried out without a strong resistance. Sunday, the tenth of March, had been fixed for the drawing and, as the day approached, the peasants became more and more determined that they would not permit themselves to be dragged away from their homes.

Three days before, a party of the tenants, together with some from adjoining estates, had come up to the chateau. Jean Martin at once came out to them.

"We have come, monsieur, to ask if you will lead us. We are determined that we will not be carried off like sheep."

"There you are right," Jean said; "but although I shall be ready to do my share of fighting, I do not wish to be a leader. In the first place, there are many gentlemen of far larger possessions and of higher rank than myself, who would naturally be your leaders. There is the Marquis de Lescure at Clisson, and with him are several other noble gentlemen, among them Henri de la Rochejaquelein—he is a cavalry officer. His family have emigrated, but he has remained here on his estates. Then, too, you have many other military officers who have served. There is Monsieur de Bonchamp, Monsieur d'Elbee, and Monsieur Dommaigne, all of whom have served in the army. If the insurrection becomes general, I shall head my own tenants, and join the force under some chosen commander; but I shall not appear as a leader. Not only am I altogether ignorant of military affairs but, were it known in Nantes that I was prominent in the rising, they would undoubtedly avenge themselves upon my relations there."

It was known that artillery and gendarmes had been gathered in all the towns of La Vendee. Two days before that appointed for the drawing, Jean said to Leigh:

"I shall ride tomorrow to the castle of Clisson. I know Monsieur de Lescure. He has wide influence, and is known to be a devoted royalist, and to have several royalist refugees now at his house. I shall be able to learn, from him, whether his intention is to take part in the insurrection. It is a long ride, and I shall not return until tomorrow.

"If you like, you can ride north to Saint Florent. If there should be any tumult, I charge you not to take any part in it. You had better leave your horse at some cabaret on this side of the town, and go in on foot. It is possible that there will be no trouble there, for they are sure to have made preparations against it; and it is more likely that there will be disturbances at smaller places. Still, it will be interesting to mark the attitude of the peasants.

"You see, if there is to be a war, it is their war. The gentlemen here would have fought for the king, had there been a shadow of a prospect of success, and had he given the smallest encouragement to his friends to rally to his support. They might even have fought against the disturbance of the clergy. But they would have had no followers. The peasants cared but little for the king and, though they did care enough for the priests to aid them to escape, they did not care enough to give battle for them. They are now going to fight for their own cause, and for their own liberty. They have to show us that they are in earnest about it, before we join them. If they are in earnest, we ought to be successful. We ought to be able to put a hundred thousand men in arms and, in such a country as this, we should be able to defy any force that the Convention can send against us; and to maintain the right of La Vendee to hold itself aloof from the doings of the rest of France.

"But, as I said, until we know that they are really in earnest, we cannot afford to throw in our lot with them; so if you go to Saint Florent, keep well away from the point where the drawing is to take place. Watch affairs from a distance. I have little doubt that those who go will go with the determination of defending themselves, but whether they will do so will depend upon whether there is one among them energetic enough to take the lead. That is always the difficulty in such matters. If there is a fight we must, as I say, simply watch it. It is, at present, no affair of ours. If it begins, we shall all have our work before us, plenty of it, and plenty of danger and excitement, but for the present we have to act as spectators."

It was a ride of fifteen miles to Saint Florent and, although Leigh had twice during the winter ridden there with Jean, he had some difficulty in finding his way through the winding roads and numerous lanes along which he had to pass. During the early part of the ride he met with but few people on the way. The church bells were ringing, as usual, and there was nothing to show that any trouble was impending; but when he arrived within two or three miles of the town, he overtook little groups of peasants walking in that direction. Some of them, he saw, carried pitchforks. The rest had stout cudgels.

Saint Florent stood on the Loire and, in an open space in the centre of the town, the authorities were gathered. Behind them was a force of gendarmes, and in the middle of their line stood a cannon.

Leigh had, as Jean had told him, left his horse outside the town; and now took up his place, with a number of townspeople, on one side of the square. As the peasants arrived, they clustered together at the end of the street, waiting for the hour to strike at which the drawing was to begin. A few minutes before the clock struck, some of the gendarmes left the group in the centre of the square, and advanced to the peasants. They were headed by an officer who, as he came up, exclaimed:

"What do you mean by coming here with pitchforks? Lay them down, at once!"

There was a low murmur among the peasants.

"Follow me!" he said to his men and, walking up to one of the men carrying a pitchfork, he said:

"I arrest you, in the name of the Republic."

In an instant a young man standing next to the one he had seized sprang forward, and struck the officer to the ground with his cudgel.

"Follow me!" he shouted. "Make for the gun!"

With a cheer the peasants rushed forward, overthrowing the gendarmes as they went. The municipal authorities, after hesitating for a moment, took to their heels in the most undignified manner. The gun had not been loaded. The gendarmes round it, seeing that they were greatly outnumbered, followed their example; and the peasants, with exultant shouts, seized the cannon and then, scattering, chased the gendarmes out of the town.

Never was a more speedy and bloodless victory. Headed by their leader, whose name was Rene Foret, the peasants went to the municipality, broke open the doors, took possession of the arms stored there, collected all the papers they could find, and made a great bonfire with them in the centre of the square. Then without harming anyone, or doing the slightest mischief, they left the town and scattered to their homes in the Bocage.

Leigh waited until all was over, returned to the cabaret where he had left his horse, and rode on. Passing through the little town of Pin a powerful-looking man, some thirty-five years old, with a quiet manner, broad forehead, and intelligent face, stepped up to him.

"Pardon, monsieur," he said; "but you have come from Saint Florent?"

"Yes," he replied.

"Has aught happened there?"

"Yes, the peasants attacked the gendarmes, who fled, leaving their cannon behind them. The peasants took what arms there were in the municipality, and made a bonfire of the papers. They then, without doing any damage, dispersed to their homes."

"They have done well," the man said. "They have made a beginning. My name, monsieur, is Cathelineau; my business, so far, has been that of a hawker. I am well known in this part of the country. Maybe, sir, you will hear my name again, for henceforth I am an insurgent. We have borne this tyranny of the butchers in Paris too long, and the time has come when we must either free ourselves of it, or die. You belong to another class, but methinks that when you see that we are in earnest, you will join."

"I doubt not that we shall," Leigh said. "I am but a lad yet; but I hope that, when the time comes, I shall do my part."

The man lifted his hat and moved off, and Leigh rode forward again. He was struck with the earnest manner of the man. He had spoken calmly and without excitement, expressed himself well, and had the air of a man who, having determined upon a thing, would carry it through.

"I expect I shall hear of him again," he said to himself. "A man like that, travelling round the country, no doubt has a deal of influence. He is just the sort of man the peasants would follow; indeed, as it seems to me, that anyone might follow."

It was late in the afternoon when he arrived home, and told his sister what he had witnessed.

"I am not surprised, Leigh," she said. "If I were a man I would take up arms, too. There must be an end to what is going on. Thousands have been murdered in Paris, men and women; and at least as many more in the other great towns. If this goes on, not only the nobles and gentry, but the middle class of France will all disappear; and these bloodstained monsters will, I suppose, set to to kill each other. I feel half French now, Leigh, and it is almost too awful to think of."

"It seems to me that the only hope is that the peasants, not only of the Bocage, but of all Poitou, Anjou, and Brittany, may rise, be joined by those of other parts, and march upon the towns; destroy them altogether, and kill all who have been concerned in these doings."

"That would be pretty sweeping, Patsey," Leigh laughed. "But you know I hate them as much as you do and, though I don't feel a bit French, I would certainly do all that I could against them, just as one would kill wild beasts who go about tearing people to pieces. It is no odds to me whether the men, women, and children they kill are French, or English. One wants to put a stop to their killing."

"I wish, now, that I had not brought you out with me, Leigh."

"In the first place, Patsey, I deny altogether that you did bring me out—Jean brought me out; and in the next place, I don't see why you should be sorry. I would not miss all this excitement, for anything. Besides, I have learned to talk French well, and something of the business of a wine merchant. I can't be taken in by having common spirit, a year or two old, passed off on me as the finest from Charente; or a common claret for a choice brand. All that is useful, even if I do not become a wine merchant. At any rate, it is more useful than stopping at Netherstock, where I should have learned nothing except a little more Latin and Greek."

"Yes, but you may be killed, Leigh."

"Well, I suppose if I had stayed at home, and got a commission in the army or a midshipman's berth in the navy, I might have been killed and, if I had my choice, I would much rather be killed in fighting against people who murder women and children, who have committed no crime whatever, than in fighting soldiers or sailors of another nation, who may be just as honest fellows as we are."

"I cannot argue with you, Leigh; but if anything happens to you I shall blame myself, all my life."

"That would be foolish," Leigh said. "It is funny what foolish ideas women have. You could not have foreseen what was coming, when you came over here; and you thought that it would be a good thing for me to accompany you, for a time. You did what you thought was best, and which I think was best. Well, if it doesn't turn out just what we expected, you cannot blame yourself for that. Why, if you were to ask me to come for a walk, and a tree fell on me as we were going along and killed me, you would hardly blame yourself because you asked me to come; and this is just the same."

"At any rate, if I do get killed, which I don't mean to be if I can help it, there is no one else who will take it very much to heart, except yourself. There are plenty of them at home and, now that I have been away nearly two years, they must almost have forgotten my existence."

"I consider you a very foolish boy," Patsey said, gravely. "You talk a great deal too much nonsense."

"Very well, Patsey; abuse is not argument, and almost every word that you have said applies equally well to your folly, in leaving a comfortable home in a quiet country to come to such a dangerous place as this.

"Now, I hope that supper is ready, for I am as hungry as a hunter."

## Chapter 3: The First Successes

The next morning, at twelve o'clock, Jean Martin reached home.

"The war has begun," he said, as he leaped from his horse. "Henri de la Rochejaquelein has accepted the leadership of the peasants, at Clisson. Lescure would have joined also, but Henri pointed out to him that it would be better not to compromise his family, until it was certain that the insurrection would become general. The young count was starting, just as I got to the chateau. He is a splendid young fellow, full of enthusiasm, and burning to avenge the misfortunes that have fallen upon his family. A peasant had arrived the evening before, with a message from his aunt, who lives farther to the south. He brought news that the chevalier de Charette—formerly a lieutenant in the navy and a strong Royalist, who had escaped the massacres at Paris, and was living quietly on his estate near Machecoul—had been asked several times, by the peasants in his neighbourhood, to take the command, and had accepted it; and that the rising was so formidable, there, that it was certain the authorities in that part of Poitou would not succeed in enforcing the conscription.

"I have told Lescure that I shall be prepared to join, as soon as there is a general movement here; but that I should attach myself to whoever took the direction of affairs in this part, for that in the first place I knew nothing of war, and in the second place I have resided here so small a portion of my time that I am scarcely known, save to my own tenants.

"After our meal, we will ride round and see how they are off for arms and powder. That is our great weakness. I am afraid, taking the whole country round, that not one man in twenty possesses a gun."

This indeed was found to be the case, as far as those on the estate were concerned. The men themselves, however, seemed to think little of this.

"We will take them from the Blues," several of them said confidently. "It does not matter a bit. They will only have time to fire one volley, in these lanes of ours, and then we shall be among them; and a pike or pitchfork are just as good, at close quarters, as a bayonet."

That the whole country was astir was evident, from the fact that the sound of the church bells rose from the woods, in all directions. All work was suspended, and the peasants flocked into the little villages to hear the news that was brought in, from several directions.

Cathelineau had, in the course of the night, gathered a party of twenty-seven men who, at daybreak, had started out from Pin, setting the church bells ringing in the villages through which they passed; until a hundred men, armed for the most part with pitchforks and stakes, had gathered round him. Then he boldly attacked the chateau of Tallais, garrisoned by a hundred and fifty soldiers, having with them a cannon. This was fired, but the shot passed over the peasants' heads, and with a shout they dashed forward, and the soldiers of the republic threw away their arms and fled. Thus Cathelineau's followers became possessed of firearms, some horses and, to their great delight, a cannon.

Their leader did not waste a moment, but marched at once against Chemille, his force increasing at every moment, as the men flocked in from the villages. There were, at Chemille, two hundred soldiers with three guns; but some of the fugitives from Tallais had already arrived there, bringing news of the desperate fury with which the peasants had attacked them and, at the sight of the throng approaching, with their captured cannon, the garrison lost heart altogether and bolted, leaving their three cannon, their ammunition, and the greater portion of their muskets behind them.

The news spread with incredible rapidity. From each village they passed through, boys were despatched as messengers, and their tidings were taken on by fresh relays. By the afternoon all the country, for thirty miles round, knew that Cathelineau had captured Tallais and Chemille, and was in possession of a quantity of arms, and four cannon.

From Saint Florent came the news that, early in the morning, a party of Republican soldiers had endeavoured to arrest Foret, who led the rising on the previous day; but that he had obtained

word of their approach and, setting the church bells ringing, had collected a force and had beaten back those who came in search of him.

Close by, a detachment of National Guards from Chollett had visited the chateau of Maulevrier. The proprietor was absent, but they carried off twelve cannon, which had been kept as family relics. The gamekeeper, Nicholas Stofflet, who was in charge of the estate, had served sixteen years in the army. He was a man of great strength, courage, and sagacity and, furious at the theft of his master's cannon, had gathered the peasantry round, and was already at the head of two hundred men.

"Things go on apace, Patsey," Jean Martin said, as they sat by the fire that evening. "We only know what is happening within some twenty or thirty miles of us, but if the spirit shown here exists throughout Poitou and Anjou, there can be no doubt that, in a very short time, the insurrection will be general. This Cathelineau, by their description, must be a man of no ordinary ability; and he has lost no time in showing his energy. For myself, I care not in the least what is the rank of my leader. Here in La Vendee there is no broad line between the seigneurs, the tenants, and the peasantry; at all rustic fetes they mix on equal terms. The seigneurs set the example, by dancing with the peasant girls; and their wives and daughters do not disdain to do the same with tenants, or peasantry. They attend the marriages, and all holiday festivities, are foremost in giving aid, and in showing kindness in cases of distress or illness; and I feel sure that, if they found in a man like Cathelineau a genius for command, they would follow him as readily as one of their own rank."

On the fourteenth the news came that the bands of Stofflet and Foret had, with others, joined that of Cathelineau. Jean Martin hesitated no longer.

"The war has fairly begun," he said. "I shall be off tomorrow morning. If Cathelineau is defeated, we shall have the Republicans devastating the whole country, and massacring women and children; as they did, last August, after a rising for the protection of the priests. Therefore I shall be fighting, now, in defence of our lives and home, wife."

"I would not keep you at home, Jean. I think it is the duty of every man to join in the defence against these wretches. I know that no mercy will be shown by them, if they conquer us. But you will not take Leigh with you, surely?"

Leigh uttered an exclamation.

"Leigh must choose for himself," Jean said quietly. "He is not French, and would have no concern in the matter, beyond that of humanity, were it not that you are here; but at present our home is his. Your life and his, also, are involved, if we are beaten. He is young to fight, but there will doubtless be many others no older, and probably much less strong than he is. Moreover, if I should be killed, it is he who must bear you the news, and must arrange with you your plans, and act as your protector.

"I do not say that I should advise your leaving the chateau directly, but if the Republicans come this way, it will be no place for you; and I should say that it would be vastly better that you should, at once, endeavour to cross to England. There are five thousand francs in gold in my bureau, which are worth three or four times their value in assignats; and should, if you can gain the coast, be amply sufficient to procure a passage for you to England.

"Do not weep, dear. It is necessary to leave you, on an undertaking of this kind, prepared for whatever may happen. At present the risk is very small. As we have heard, the fury of the peasants has struck such consternation into the National Guards, and newly-raised soldiers, that they will not await their onslaught; and it will not be until the Convention becomes aware of the really serious nature of the storm they have raised, that there will be any hard fighting. Still, even in a petty skirmish men fall; and it is right that, before I go, we should arrange as to what course you had best pursue, in case of my death.

"From the first, when we came here we did so with our eyes open. If we had merely sought safety, we should have gone to England. We came here partly because it is my home, and therefore



my proper place; and partly because, in case La Vendee rose against these executioners of Paris, every man of honour and loyalty should aid in the good cause."

"I know, Jean, and I would not keep you back."

"The struggle has begun and, if the Republicans conquer La Vendee, we know how awful will be the persecutions, what thousands of victims will be slaughtered. Our only hope is in victory and, at any rate, those who die on the battlefield will be happy, in comparison with those who fall into the hands of the Blues."

"You wish to go, Leigh?"

"Certainly I do," the lad said. "I think that everyone strong enough to carry arms, in La Vendee, ought to join and do his best. I can shoot better than most of the peasantry, not one in twenty of whom has ever had a gun in his hands; and I am sure that I am as strong as most of them. Besides, if I had been at home I should, now the war has begun, have tried to get a commission and to fight the French—I mean the people who govern France at present—and in fighting them, here, I am only doing what thousands of Englishmen will be doing elsewhere."

"Very well, Leigh, then you shall go with Jean. I shall certainly be glad to know you are together, so that if one is wounded or ill, the other can look after him and bring him here. I shall do the best I can, while you are away."

"I think that we shall soon be back again, and that we shall be constantly seeing you," Jean said. "You may be sure that the peasants will not keep the field. They will gather and fight and, win or lose, they will then scatter to their homes again, until the church bells call them out to repel a fresh attack of the enemy. That is our real weakness. There will never be any discipline, never any common aim."

"If all the peasants in the west would join in a great effort, and march on Paris, I believe that the peasantry of the departments through which they pass would join us. It would only be the National Guards of the towns, and the new levies, that we should have to meet; and I believe that we might take Paris, crush the scum of the faubourgs, and hang every member of the Convention. But they will never do it. It will be a war of defence, only; and a war so carried out must, in the long run, be an unsuccessful one."

"However, the result will be that we shall never be very far away from home, and shall often return for a few days. You must always keep a change of clothes, and your trinkets and so on, packed up; so that at an hour's notice you and Marthe can start with the child, either on receiving a note from me telling you where to join us, or if you get news that a force from Nantes is marching rapidly in this direction. Two horses will always remain in the stables, in readiness to put into the light cart. Henri will be your driver. Francois you must send off to find us, and tell us the road that you have taken. However, of course we shall make all these arrangements later on, when affairs become more serious. I don't think there is any chance, whatever, of the enemy making their way into the country for weeks, perhaps for months, to come."

The next morning, Jean Martin and Leigh started early. Each carried a rifle slung behind him, a brace of pistols in his holsters, and a sword in his belt. Patsey had recovered from her depression of the previous evening, and her natural good spirits enabled her to maintain a cheerful face at parting; especially as her husband's assurances, that there would be no serious fighting for some time, had somewhat calmed her fears for their safety.

"The horses are useful to us, for carrying us about, Leigh," Jean Martin said, as they rode along; "but unless there are enough mounted men to act as cavalry, we shall have to do any fighting that has to be done on foot. The peasants would not follow a mounted officer as they would one who placed himself in front of them, and fought as they fought."

"I hope that, later on, we may manage to get them to adopt some sort of discipline; but I have great doubts about it. The peasantry of La Vendee are an independent race. They are respectful to their seigneurs, and are always ready to listen to their advice; but it is respect, and not obedience. I fancy, from what I have read of your Scottish Highlanders, that the feeling here closely resembles

that among the clans. They regard their seigneurs as their natural heads, and would probably die for them in the field; but in other matters each goes his own way, and the chiefs know better than to strain their power beyond a certain point.

"As you see, they have already their own leaders—Stofflet the gamekeeper, Foret the woodcutter, and Cathelineau, a small peddling wool merchant. Doubtless many men of rank and family will join them, and will naturally, from their superior knowledge, take their place as officers; but I doubt whether they will displace the men who have, from the beginning, taken the matter in hand. I am glad that it should be so. The peasants understand men of their own class, and will, I believe, follow them better than they would men above them in rank. They will, at least, have no suspicion of them; and the strength of the insurrection lies in the fact that it is a peasant rising, and not an insurrection stirred up by men of family."

At ten o'clock they arrived at Cathelineau's camp. Just as they reached the spot, they encountered Monsieur Sapinaud de la Verrie. He was riding at the head of about a hundred peasants, all of whom were armed with muskets. They had, early that morning, attacked the little town of Herbiers. It was defended by two companies of soldiers, with four or five cannon; and the Republicans of the town had ranged themselves with the Blues. Nevertheless the peasants, led by their commander and his nephew, had fearlessly attacked them and, with a loss of only two or three wounded, defeated the enemy and captured the place, obtaining a sufficient supply of muskets to arm themselves.

As Jean Martin was known to Monsieur Sapinaud, they saluted each other cordially.

"So you are coming willingly, Monsieur Martin. There you have the advantage of me, for these good fellows made me and my nephew come with them, as their leaders, and would take no refusal. However, they but drew us into the matter a few days earlier than we had intended; for we had already made up our minds to join the movement."

"I come willingly enough, Monsieur Sapinaud. If I had remained in Nantes, I should have been guillotined by this time; and I made up my mind when I left there that I would, on the first opportunity, do a little fighting before I was put an end to."

"This is my brother-in-law. He has been out here now nearly two years, and has seen enough of the doings of the murderers at Nantes to hate them as much as I do."

The streets of the little village, which Cathelineau had made his headquarters, were thronged with men. Through these the four mounted gentlemen made their way slowly until, when they came to the church, they saw three men standing apart from the others.

"That is Cathelineau, the one standing in the middle," Leigh said.

"We have come to place ourselves under your orders," Monsieur Sapinaud said, as they rode up to him; and he named himself and his companions.

"I am glad indeed to see you, sirs," Cathelineau said. "You are the first gentlemen who have joined us here; though I hear that, farther south, some have already declared themselves. We want you badly."

"One of you I have seen already," and he smiled at Leigh. "I told you that you would hear of me, young sir; and you see I have kept my word."

"These with me are Stofflet who, as you may have heard, recaptured the cannon the Blues took at Clisson; and Foret, who had the honour of striking the first blow, at Saint Florent."

"Your names are all widely known in this part," Monsieur Sapinaud said, courteously. "Well, sirs, we have come to fight under your orders. I have brought a hundred men with me, and we have already done something on our own account; for we last night captured Herbiers, which was defended by two companies, with four cannon. We have gained a sufficient number of muskets to arm all our party."

"If I do not offer to give up the leadership to you, Monsieur de la Verrie," Cathelineau said gravely, "it is from no desire on my part to be a commander; but I am widely known to the peasantry of many parishes round Pin and, perhaps because I understand them better than most, they have

confidence in me; and would, I think, follow me rather than a gentleman like yourself, of whom they know but little."

"They are quite right," Monsieur Sapinaud said. "The peasantry commenced this war. It is right that they should choose their own leaders. You and your two companions have already their confidence, and it is far better that you should be their leaders. I believe all other gentlemen who join you will be as ready as we are to follow you, and I am sure that the only rivalry will be as to who shall most bravely expose himself, when he faces the enemy."

"I thank you, sir," Cathelineau said. "I believe earnestly that, in many respects, it is best that the peasants should have their own leaders. We can associate ourselves with their feelings, better than the gentry could do. We shall have more patience with their failings."

"You would want to make an army of them. We know that this cannot be done. They will fight and die as bravely as men could do, but I know that they will never submit to discipline. After a battle, they will want to hurry off to their homes. They will obey the order to fight, but that is the only order one can rely upon their obeying."

"We are on the point of starting for Chollet. It is a town where the people are devoted to the cause of the Convention. At the last drawing for the militia they killed, without any pretext, a number of young men who had come, unarmed, into the town. Many inhabitants of adjoining parishes have been seized and thrown in prison, charged only with being hostile to the Convention, and expressing horror at the murder of the king."

"The capture will produce an impression throughout the country. They have three or four hundred dragoons there, and yesterday, we hear, they called in the National Guard from the villages round, though scarce believing that we should venture to attack them. Your reinforcement of a hundred men, all armed with muskets, will be a very welcome one; for they will hardly suspect that many of us have firearms. However we had, before your arrival, three hundred who have so armed themselves, through captures at Saint Florent and Chemille."

He now ordered the bell to be rung and, as soon as its notes pealed out, started; followed at once by the crowd in the village, without any sort of order or regularity. Jean and Leigh continued to ride with Monsieur de la Verrie and his nephew.

After some hours' marching, at two o'clock in the afternoon they approached Chollet. On the way they received considerable reinforcements, from the villages they passed through. As soon as they approached the town they saw the dragoons pouring out, followed by three or four hundred National Guards.

The Vendéans now fell into some sort of order. A short council of war was held. It was arranged that Monsieur de la Verrie with his hundred musketeers, and Foret with as many more, should advance against the dragoons; while Cathelineau and Stofflet, with a hundred musketeers and the main body of peasants with their pitchforks, should attack the National Guards.

The dragoons had expected that the mere sight of them would be sufficient to send the peasants flying, and they were amazed that they should continue to advance. As soon as they were within easy range, the peasants opened fire. At the first volley the colonel of the dragoons and many of his men fell. Reloading, the peasants advanced at a run, poured in a volley at close quarters; and then, with loud cheers, charged the dragoons.

These, being but newly raised troops, were seized with a panic, turned, and galloped off at full speed. Astounded at the defeat of the cavalry, in whom they had confidently trusted, the National Guard at once lost heart and as, with loud shouts, Cathelineau with his peasants flung themselves upon them, they, too, broke, and fled in all directions.

The peasants pursued them for a league, and then returned, exultant, to Chollet. Here the leading revolutionists were thrown in prison but, with the exception of the National Guards who attempted resistance after reaching the town, no lives were taken. A large quantity of arms, money, and ammunition fell into the hands of the victors.

Scarcely had the peasants gathered in Chollet, than the news arrived that the National Guard of Saumur were marching against them; and Cathelineau requested Monsieur de la Verrie and Foret, with their following, to go out to meet them. They marched away at once, and met the enemy at Vihiers.

Unprepared for an attack, the National Guard at once broke and fled, throwing away their arms and abandoning their cannon. Among these was one taken from the Chateau de Richelieu. It had been given by Louis the Thirteenth to the cardinal. On the engraving, with which it was nearly covered, the peasants thought that they could make out an image of the Virgin, and so called it by her name. With these trophies the party returned to Chollet.

The next day being Saturday the little army dispersed, the peasants making their way to their homes, in order to spend Easter there; while Cathelineau, with only a small body, remained at Chollet. From here messengers were sent to Messieurs Bonchamp, d'Elbee, and Dommaigne—all officers who had served in the army, but had retired when the revolution broke out. Cathelineau offered to share the command with them, and entreated them to give their military knowledge and experience to the cause.

All assented. Thus the force had the advantage, from this time forward, of being commanded by men who knew the business of war.

Leigh had started for home as soon as the National Guards of Saumur were defeated; Jean Martin, at Cathelineau's request, remaining with him in order to join some other gentlemen, who had that day arrived, in calling upon the three officers, and inviting them to join Cathelineau in the command.

Leigh's sister ran out, as he rode up to the house. The news of the capture of Chollet, almost without loss, had already spread and, although surprised, she felt no alarm at seeing Leigh alone.

"I hear that you have taken Chollet, and defeated the dragoons and National Guards."

"Yes; and this morning we put to flight the guards of Saumur, without the loss of a single man. I don't know what it may come to, presently; but just now it can hardly be called fighting. The sight of peasants rushing on seems to strike these heroes with a panic, at once; and they are off helter skelter, throwing away their guns and ammunition."

"Have you come home only to tell me the news, Leigh?"

"I have come home because, at present, our army has evaporated into thin air. Tomorrow being Easter Sunday, the peasants have all scattered to their homes; so that it was of no use my staying at Chollet. Cathelineau is there, and the other leaders; among them Monsieur de la Verrie, a nephew of his, Jean, and several other gentlemen, who have just arrived there. They are going as a sort of deputation, tomorrow, to Bonchamp, d'Elbee, and another officer whose name I forget, to ask them to join Cathelineau in the command. I think that he will still remain as leader, and that they will act as his councillors, and in command of columns."

"Then your impression of this man is confirmed?"

"More than confirmed. Jean said, this morning, that he was a born leader of men. While all round him there is excitement and confusion, he is as calm and serene as if he were alone. He is evidently a man who has read a good deal, and thought a good deal; and I can quite understand the influence he has gained over the peasantry in his neighbourhood, and that it has long been their custom to refer all disputes to him.

"Stofflet is a different sort of man. He is tall and powerful in frame, stern and almost morose in manner. He has been sixteen years a soldier; and was, I hear, distinguished for his bravery."

"And Foret?"

"He is an active young woodman, evidently a determined fellow and, as he was the first to lead the peasants against the Blues, he is sure to have a following. They are three very different characters, but all of them well fitted to act as peasant leaders."

"And will Jean be a leader?"

"Not a leader, Patsey; that is to say, certainly not a general. He does not want it, himself. But he will no doubt lead the peasants on the estate, and perhaps those in the neighbourhood. You know that he would not have the church bell rung, when he started, because he did not wish the tenants to join until he had seen the result of the first fight; but when he comes home he will summon those who like to go with him."

"Yes, I have had to explain that, over and over again. Yesterday and today almost all the men have been up here, to ask why Jean did not take them. I told them that that was one reason; and another was that, had they started on foot when you did, they would not have arrived in time to take part in the fight at Chollet."

The conversation, begun as Leigh dismounted, had been continued in the house, the groom having taken the horse round to the stable.

"So the peasants fought well, Leigh?"

"They would have fought well, if the Blues had given them a chance; but these would not stop till they came up to them. If they had done so, I am convinced that the peasants would have beaten them. There was no mistaking the way they rushed forward and, upon my word, I am not surprised that the enemy gave way; although well armed, and not far inferior in numbers, they would have had no chance with them."

"And did you rush forward, Leigh?"

"We were with the party that attacked the cavalry. Jean and I fired our rifles twice, and after that we only saw the backs of the cavalry. If they had been well-drilled troops they ought to have scattered us like sheep; for everything must have gone down before them, had they charged. There was no sort of order among us. The men were not formed into companies. There was no attempt to direct them. Each simply joined the leader he fancied and, when the word was given, charged forward at the top of his speed. It is all very well against the National Guards, and these young troops; but as Jean said, it would be a different affair, altogether, if we were to meet trained soldiers."

"But the peasants seem to be quick, and I expect they will adopt tactics better suited to the country, when they come to fighting in these lanes and woods. You see, so far a very small proportion have been armed with guns, and their only chance was to rush at once to close quarters; but we have captured so many muskets, at Chollet and Vihiers, that in future a considerable proportion of the peasants will have guns and, when they once learn to use the hedges, they will be just as good as trained troops."

"Then I suppose Jean is more hopeful about the future than he was?"

"I don't say that, Patsey. He thinks that we shall make a hard fight of it, but that the end must depend upon whether the people in Paris, rather than keep fifty thousand men engaged in a desperate conflict, here, when they are badly wanted on the frontier, decide to suspend the conscription in La Vendee, and to leave us to ourselves. There can be no doubt that that would be their best plan. But as they care nothing for human life, even if it cost them a hundred thousand men to crush us; they are likely to raise any number of troops, and send them against us, rather than allow their authority to be set at defiance."

"Do you know, Patsey, when I used to read about Guy Fawkes wanting to blow up the Houses of Parliament, I thought that he must be a villain, indeed, to try to destroy so many lives; but I have changed my opinion now for, if I had a chance, I would certainly blow up the place where the Convention meets, and destroy every soul within its walls; including the spectators, who fill the galleries and howl for blood."

"Well you see, Leigh, as Guy Fawkes and the other conspirators failed in their attempt, I am afraid there is very small chance of your being able to carry out the plan more successfully."

"I am afraid there is not," Leigh said regretfully. "I should never be able to dig a way into the vaults, and certainly I should not be able to get enough powder to blow a big building up, if I could."

No; I was only saying that, if Guy Fawkes hated the Parliament as much as I hate the Convention, there is some excuse to be made for him.

"Now, Patsey, I am as hungry as a hunter."

"I have a good supper ready for you," she said. "I thought it was quite possible that you and Jean would both come home, this evening; for I felt sure that most of the peasants would be coming back, if possible, for Easter Sunday; and I had no doubt that, if you did come, you would both be hungry."

"Have you any news from other districts?" he asked, after he had finished his supper.

"There is a report that Captain Charette has gathered nearly twenty thousand peasants, in lower Poitou; and that he has already gained a success over the Blues. There are reports, too, of risings in Brittany."

"There is no doubt that things are going on well, at present, Patsey. You see, we are fighting on our own ground, and fifty thousand men can be called to arms in the course of a few hours, by the ringing of the church bells. We have no baggage, no waggons, no train of provisions; we are ready to fight at once.

"On the other hand, the Blues have been taken completely by surprise. They have no large force nearer than the frontier, or at any rate nearer than Paris; and it will be weeks before they can gather an army such as even they must see will be required for the conquest of La Vendée. Up to that time it can be only a war of skirmishes, unless our leaders can persuade the peasants to march against Paris; and that, I fear, they will never be able to do.

"When the enemy are really ready, the fighting will be desperate. 'Tis true that the Vendéans have a good cause—they fight for their religion and their freedom, while the enemy will fight only because they are ordered to do so. There is another thing—every victory we win will give us more arms, ammunition, and cannon; while a defeat will mean simply that the peasants will scatter to their homes, and be ready to answer the next call for their services. On the other hand, if the Blues are defeated they will lose so heavily, both in arms and stores; and will suffer such loss of life, from their ignorance of our roads and lanes, that it will be a long time before they will again be able to advance against us."

The next morning, after the service at the church was over, the peasants came down in numbers to the chateau, to hear from Leigh a full account of the fighting at Chollet and Vihiers, a report of the latter event having arrived that morning. There were exclamations of lively pleasure at the recital, mingled with regret that they had not borne their share in the fighting.

"You will have plenty of opportunities," Leigh said. "Monsieur Martin has told me that, when he next leaves home, all who are willing to do so can go with him. But it may be some little time before anything of importance takes place; and as, at present, what fighting there is is a considerable distance away, he thinks it best that you should reserve yourselves for some great occasion; unless, indeed, the Blues endeavour to penetrate the Bocage, when, I have no doubt, you will know how to deal with them, when they are entangled in your lanes and woods."

"We will go, every man of us!" one of the peasants shouted, and the cry was re-echoed, with enthusiasm, by the whole of the men.

It was nearly an hour before Leigh and his sister were able to withdraw from the crowd, and make their way homeward.

"It is difficult to believe that men so ready and eager to fight can be beaten," she said. "Did you notice, too, that their wives all looked on approvingly? I believe that, even if any of the men wished to stay away, they would be hounded to the front by the women. I think that, with them, it would be regarded as a war for their religion; while with the men it is the conscription that has chiefly driven them to take up arms."

## Chapter 4: Cathelineau's Scouts

For some days nothing happened. The insurrection spread like wildfire, in Poitou and Anjou; and everywhere the peasants were successful, the authorities, soldiers, and gendarmes for the most part flying without waiting for an attack.

The news that all La Vendée was in insurrection astonished and infuriated the Convention, which at once took steps to suppress it. On the second of April a military commission was appointed, with power to execute all peasants taken with arms in their hands, and all who should be denounced as suspicious persons. General Berruyer was sent down to take the command. The large army that had been raised, principally from the mob of Paris for the defence of that city, marched down; and Berruyer, at the head of this force, entered the Bocage on the tenth of April.

The time had passed quietly at the chateau. The peasants had dispersed at once and, except that the principal leaders and a small body of men remained together, watching the course of events, all was as quiet as if profound peace reigned.

Jean Martin had returned home. Two days after arriving, he had called all the tenants on the estate together, and had endeavoured to rouse them to the necessity of acquiring a certain amount of discipline. He had brought with him a waggon load of muskets and ammunition, which had been discovered at Chollet after the main bulk of the peasants had departed; and Cathelineau had allowed him to carry them off, in order that the peasantry in the neighbourhood of the chateau should be provided with a proportion of guns, when the day of action arrived. The peasants gladly received the firearms, but could not be persuaded to endeavour to fight in any sort of order.

"They did not do it at Chollet, or elsewhere," they exclaimed, "and yet they beat the Blues easily. What good did discipline do to the enemy? None. Why, then, should we bother ourselves about it? When the enemy comes, we will rush upon them when they are tangled in our thickets."

Leigh was somewhat more successful. The fact that he had fought at Chollet, and was their seigneur's brother-in-law, had established a position for him in the eyes of peasants of his own age; and as he went from house to house, talking with them, he succeeded in getting some twenty boys to agree to follow him. He had been nominated an officer by the three generals, who had picked out, without reference to rank or age, those who they thought would, either from position, energy, or determination, fill the posts well. Thus one company was commanded by a noble, the next by a peasant; and each would, on the day of battle, fight equally well.

Leigh's arguments were such as were suited to the lads he addressed.

"You see, if you go with the bands of men, you will be lost in the crowd. The men will rush forward in front, you will all be in the rear. You want to serve your country. Well, you can serve it much better by watching the movements of the enemy, and carrying word of it to the commander. Then, sometimes, we can have a little enterprise of our own—cut off a post of the enemy, or manage to decoy them into lanes where we know their guns will stick fast.

"It is not size and strength that are most necessary in war; but quickness, alertness, and watchfulness. You know that, already, the leaders have found that nothing can persuade the men to keep guard, or to carry out outpost duty. If we do this, even if we do nothing else, we shall be serving the cause much better than if we were to join in a general rush upon the enemy."

"But we shall have no muskets with us," one of the boys objected.

"Nor would you want them. You would have to move about quickly, and guns would be terribly inconvenient, if you had to push your way through a hedge or a close thicket. And besides, if you had guns they would not be of much use to you, for none of you are accustomed to their use, and it needs a great deal of training to learn to shoot straight.

"I am quite sure that if I were to march with twenty of you to Cathelineau's headquarters, and were to say to him, 'We have come here, sir, to act as scouts for you, to bring you in news of the

movements of the enemy, and to do anything in our power to prevent you from being surprised,' he would be more pleased than if I had brought him a hundred men armed with muskets."

When twenty had expressed their willingness to go, Leigh asked Jean, who had warmly entered into the plan, to speak to the fathers of the lads and get them to consent to their going with him. He accordingly called them together for that purpose.

"But do you mean that they will be away altogether, master?"

"Yes, while this goes on."

"But we shall lose their labour in the fields?"

"There will not be much labour in the fields, till this is over; and by having scouts watching the enemy you will get early news of their coming, and have time to drive off your beasts before they arrive."

"But how will they live?"

"When they are in this neighbourhood, one or two can come back and fetch bread. If they are too far off for that, my brother will buy bread for them. In cases where they cannot well be spared, I will remit a portion of your dues, as long as they are away; but this will not be for long, for I can see that, ere many weeks are past, the Blues will be swarming round in such numbers that there will be little time for work on your land, and you will all have to make great sacrifices.

"You must remember that the less there is in your barns, the more difficult it will be for an enemy to invade you; for if they can find nothing here, they will have to bring everything with them, and every waggon will add to their difficulties. My brother tells me that one of the things he means to do is to break up the roads, when he finds out by which line the Blues are advancing; and for that purpose I shall serve out, from my store, either a pick or an axe to each of the band."

At last all difficulties were got over, and twenty lads were enrolled. Another three weeks passed. The peasants of Poitou and Anjou thought but little of the storm that was gathering round them.

General Berruyer had arrived from Paris, with his army. A portion of the army from Brest moved down to Nantes; and were in concert, with the army of La Rochelle, to sweep that part of La Vendée bordering on the coast. General Canclaus was at Nantes, with two thousand troops. General Dayat was sent to Niort, with six thousand men; and was to defend the line between Sables and Saint Gilles. Bressuire was occupied by General Quetineau, with three thousand men. Leigonyer, with from four to five thousand men, occupied Vihiers; while Saint Lambert was held by Ladouce, with two thousand five hundred. The right bank of the Loire, between Nantes and Angers, was held by fifteen hundred men of the National Guard.

Thus that part of upper Poitou where the rising had been most successful was surrounded by a cordon of troops; which the Convention hoped, and believed, would easily stamp out the insurrection, and take a terrible vengeance for what had passed.

When the storm would burst, none knew; but Jean one day said to Leigh that it was certain that it must come soon; and that, if he was still resolved to carry out his plan, it was time that he set out.

"I am quite ready to carry out my plans, Jean, as you know; but dangers seem to threaten from so many quarters that I don't like going away from home. While my company are scattered near Chollet, for instance, the Blues may be burning down your chateau."

"I don't think there is much danger of that, Leigh. It is quite certain that, as soon as these divisions begin to move, they will have their hands full. We may hope that in some cases they will be defeated. In others they may drive off the peasants, and march to the town that they intend to occupy, but they will only hold the ground they stand upon. They will not be able to send out detached parties to attack chateaux or destroy villages.

"For the present, I have no fear whatever of their coming here. We are well away from any of the roads that they are likely to march by. I don't say that any of the roads are good, but they will assuredly keep on the principal lines, and not venture to entangle themselves in our country lanes. There are no villages of any size within miles of us, and this is one of the most thickly wooded parts



of the Bocage—which, as you know, means the thicket—therefore I shall, when the time comes, leave your sister without uneasiness. We may be quite sure that if, contrary to my anticipation, any column should try to make its way through this neighbourhood, it would be hotly opposed, and she will have ample time to take to the woods, where she and the child will find shelter in any of the foresters' cottages.

"She is going to have peasant dresses made for her and Marthe. She will of course drive, as we intended; and the two men will take the horse and vehicle to some place in the woods, at a considerable distance from here, and keep it there until we join her and carry out our original plan of making for the coast. Directly you are gone, I shall make it my business to find out the most out of the way spot among the woods; and ride over and make an arrangement, with some woodman with a wife and family living there, to receive her, if necessary; and I will let you know the spot fixed on, and give you directions how to find it."

In order to add to Leigh's influence and authority, Martin persuaded the village cure—who was a man of much intelligence, and perceived that real good might be done by this party of lads—to have a farewell service in the church. Accordingly, on the morning on which they were to start, all attended the church, which was filled by their friends; and here he addressed the boys, telling them that the service in which they were about to engage was one that would be of great importance to their country, and that it would demand all their energy and strength. He then asked them to take an oath to carry out all orders they might receive from their leader, the seigneur's brother; who would himself share in their work, and the many hardships they might have to undergo.

"Here," he said, "is a gentleman who is by birth a foreigner, but who has come to love the land that his sister adopted as her own; and to hate its enemies—these godless murderers of women and children, these executioners of their king, these enemies of the church—so much that he is ready to leave his home, and all his comforts, and to risk his life in its cause. Remember that you have voluntarily joined him, and accepted him as your leader. The work once begun, there must be no drawing back. There is not a man in La Vendée who is not prepared to give his life, if need be, to the cause; and you, in your way, can do as much or more."

He then administered an oath to each lad and, as had been arranged, Leigh also took an oath to care for them in every respect, and to share their risks and dangers. Then the cure pronounced his blessing upon them, and the service ended.

Very greatly impressed with what had taken place, the little band marched out from the church, surrounded by their friends. Jean Martin then presented hatchets or light picks to each, and a waist belt in which the tools should be carried. As a rule, the peasants carried leathern belts over the shoulders, in which a sword, hatchet, or other weapon was slung; but Jean thought the waist belt would be much more convenient for getting rapidly through hedges or thickets, and it had also the advantage that a long knife, constituting in itself a formidable weapon, could also be carried in it.

Patsey presented them each with a hat, of which a supply had been obtained from Saint Florent. These were of the kind ordinarily worn by the peasants, in shape like the modern broad-brimmed wide-awake, but made of much stiffer material. She had bought these to give a certain uniformity to the band, of whom some already wore hats of this kind, others long knitted stocking caps, while others again were bare headed.

She added a piece of green ribbon round each hat. Leigh objected to this, on the ground that they might sometimes have to enter towns, and that any badge of this sort would be speedily noticed; but as she said, they would only have to take them off, when engaged in such service.

A quarter of an hour after leaving the church they marched away, amid the acclamations of their friends; each boy feeling a sensation of pride in the work that he had undertaken, and in the ceremony of which he had been the centre.

"Now, lads," Leigh said, as soon as they were fairly away from the village, "instead of walking along as a loose body, you had better form four abreast, and endeavour to keep step. It is no more

difficult to walk that way than in a clump; and indeed, by keeping step it makes the walking easy, and it has the advantage that you can act much more quickly. If we heard an enemy approaching, and I gave the order, 'Ten go to the right and ten go to the left!' you would not know which were to go.

"Now each four of you will form a section, and the order into which you fall now, you will always observe. Then if I say, 'First two sections to the right, the other three sections to the left!' every one of you knows what to do, instead of having to wait until I mention all your names.

"This is nearly all the drill you will have to learn. You can choose your places now, but afterwards you will have to keep to them, so those of you who are brothers and special friends will, naturally, fall in next to each other."

In a minute or two the arrangements were made, and the party proceeded four abreast, with Leigh marching at their head. For the first hour or so, he had some difficulty in getting them to keep step; but they presently fell into it, time being kept by breaking into one of the canticles of the church.

After a long day's march, they arrived at the village which Cathelineau now occupied as his headquarters; as it had been necessary, in view of the threatening circle of the various columns of the enemy, to remove the headquarters from Chollet to a central point, from which he could advance, at once, against whichever of these columns might first move forward into the heart of the country. The lads all straightened themselves up as they marched through the streets, the unwonted spectacle of twenty peasant lads, marching in order, exciting considerable surprise. Cathelineau was standing at the door of the house he occupied, conversing with Messieurs Bonchamp and d'Elbee.

"Ah, Monsieur Stansfield," he said, "is it you?" as Leigh halted his party, and raised his hat. "You are the most military-looking party I have yet seen. They are young, but none the worse for that."

"There is nothing military about them, except that they march four abreast," he said, with a smile, "but for the work we have come to do, drill will not be necessary. I have raised this band on Jean Martin's estate, sir, and with your permission I propose to call them 'Cathelineau's scouts.' It seemed, to my brother and myself, that you sorely need scouts to inform you of the movements of the enemy, the roads by which they are approaching, their force and order. I have therefore raised this little body of lads of my own age. They will remain with me permanently, as long as the occasion needs. They will go on any special mission with which you may charge them; and will, at other times, watch all the roads by which an enemy would be likely to advance."

"If they will do that, Monsieur Stansfield, they will be valuable, indeed; that is just what I cannot get the peasants to do. When it comes to fighting, they will obey orders; but at all other times they regard themselves as their own masters, and neither entreaties nor the offer of pay suffices to persuade them to undertake such work as you are proposing to carry out. Consequently, it is only by chance that we obtain any news of the enemy's movements. I wish we had fifty such parties."

"They would be valuable, indeed," Monsieur d'Elbee said. "The obstinacy of the peasantry is maddening.

"How do you propose to feed your men?"

"When we are within reach of their homes, two will go back to fetch bread for the whole; when we are too far away, I shall buy it in one of the villages."

"When you are within reach of my headquarters, wherever that may be, you have only to send in; and they shall have the loaves served out to them, the same as the band who remain here. We are not short of money, thanks to the captures we have made.

"I see that none of your band have firearms."

"No, sir. Jean Martin would have let me have some of the muskets he brought from here, but it seemed to me that they would be an encumbrance. We may have to trust to our swiftness of foot to escape and, at any rate, we shall want to carry messages to you as quickly as possible. The weight of a gun and ammunition would make a good deal of difference; and would, moreover, be in our way in getting through the woods and hedges."

"But for all that, you ought to have some defence," Cathelineau said; "and if you came upon a patrol of cavalry, though only three or four in number, you would be in a bad case with only those knives to defend yourselves."

"Do you know whether there are any pistols in the storehouse, Monsieur Bonchamp?"

"Yes, there are some that were picked up from the cavalrymen we killed. They have not been given out yet."

"Then I think we had better serve out a pistol, with a score of cartridges, to each of these lads."

"If you let them fire three or four rounds at the trunk of a tree, or some mark of that sort, Monsieur Stansfield, they will get to know something about the use of the weapons."

"Thank you, sir. That would be excellent, and would certainly enable us to face a small party of the enemy, if we happen to encounter them."

"Please form the boys up two deep," Cathelineau said. "I will say a word or two to them."

The manoeuvre was not executed in military style, but the boys were presently arranged in order.

"I congratulate you, lads," Cathelineau went on, "in having devoted yourselves to your country, and that in a direction that will be most useful. I trust that you will strictly obey the orders of your commander; and will remember that you will be of far more use, in carrying them out, than in merely helping to swell the number in a pitched battle. I have every confidence in Monsieur Stansfield. He has set a noble example to the youths of this country, in thus undertaking arduous and fatiguing work, which is not without its dangers."

"I was glad to see that you marched in here, in order. I hope that you will go a little further, and learn to form line quickly, and to gather at his call. These things may seem to you to make very little difference, but in fact will make a great deal. You saw that you were at least a couple of minutes forming in line just now. Supposing the enemy's cavalry had been charging down upon you, that two minutes lost would have made all the difference between your receiving them in order, or being in helpless confusion when they came up."

"I have no doubt that one of my generals here has, among his followers, someone who served in the army, and who will teach you within the course of an hour, if you pay attention to his instructions, how to form into line, and back again into fours."

"I will give them an hour myself," Monsieur Bonchamp said. "I have nothing particular to do, and should be glad to instruct young fellows who are so willing, and well disposed."

"Are you too tired to drill now? You have had a long march."

A general negative was the reply.

"Well, then, march to the open space, just outside the town, and we will begin at once."

Feeling very proud of the honour of being drilled by a general, the boys fell into their formation, and followed Monsieur Bonchamp and Leigh. They were at a loss, at first, to comprehend the instructions given them; but by the end of an hour, they had fairly mastered the very simple movement.

"That will do," Monsieur Bonchamp said. "Of course you are not perfect, yet; but with a quarter of an hour's drill by your commander, every day, at the end of a week you will be able to do it quickly and neatly; and you will certainly find it a great advantage, if you come upon the enemy."

A large empty room was allotted to them and, as they sat down on the floor and munched the bread that they had brought with them, they felt quite enthusiastic over their work. It was a high honour, indeed, to have been praised by Monsieur Cathelineau, and been taught by one of his generals. They even felt the advantage that the drill had given them, contrasting the quickness with which they had finally formed into line, with their trouble in arranging themselves before Monsieur Cathelineau. The fact, too, that they were next morning to be furnished with pistols was a great gratification to them and, over and over again, they said to each other:

"What will the people at home say, when they hear that Monsieur Cathelineau has praised us, that Monsieur Bonchamp himself has drilled us, and that we are to be provided with pistols?"

In the morning, the pistols and ammunition were served out. Leigh had, during the previous evening, seen Cathelineau and asked for orders.

"I cannot say exactly the line the Blues are likely to take. I should say that you had better make Chemille your headquarters. Berruyer, who is their new commander, has arrived at Saint Lambert. There is a strong force at Thouars, being a portion of the army from Saint Lambert. The enemy are also in force at Vihiers, and at Parthenay.

"It is from the forces at Thouars and Vihiers that danger is most likely to come. Doubtless other columns will come from the north, but we shall hear of their having crossed the Loire in time to oppose them; and with so small a band as yours, you will be amply employed in watching Thouars. There are many roads, all more or less bad, by which they may march; as soon as you ascertain that they are moving, and by which route, you will send a messenger to me.

"Any others of your band that you may have with you, send off to all the villages round. Give them warning, set the bells ringing, promise that aid will soon arrive, and urge them to harass the enemy, to fell trees across the road, and to impede their advance in every possible way.

"I will give you half a dozen papers, for the use of yourself and your messengers, saying that you are acting under my orders, and are charged with raising the country, directly the enemy advance. But above all, it is important that I should get the earliest possible information as to the route by which they are moving; as it will take us thirty-six hours before we can gather in anything like our full strength.

"It will be useful that you should spread false news as to our whereabouts. Your boys can say, in one village, that we are marching towards Tours; in another, that we are massed in the neighbourhood of Saint Florent; in a third that they hear that the order is, that all able-bodied men are to go west to oppose the force coming from Nantes, which has already taken Clisson, and carried Monsieur de Lescure and his family, prisoners, to Bressuire."

"We shall have to tell the villagers, sir, that we wish this news to be given to the Blues, if they should come there or, if questioned, they would tell them something else. I am sure that even the women would suffer themselves to be killed, rather than give any news that they thought would be useful to the enemy."

"You are right. Yes, you must tell them that this is what we want the Blues to believe, and that it is my wish that these are the answers to be given to any of them who may enter the village."

"The only thing, sir, is that they may find the villages empty, as they come along. The women and children will, no doubt, take to the woods. The men will, perhaps, offer some resistance; but when they find how strong the Blues are, will probably hurry to join you."

"There will probably be a few old people remaining in each village. However, we must trust much to chance. The great thing is for you to let me know, as soon as their main body is in motion. Whichever way they come, we must meet and attack them. It is in the woods and lanes that we must defend ourselves."

"I will endeavour to carry out your orders, sir; and shall start tomorrow morning, as soon as we get our pistols."

As soon as the little band was well away from the town, the pistols were loaded; and each of the lads, in turn, fired three shots at the trunk of a tree, at a distance of ten yards, under Leigh's directions. The shooting was quite as good as he had expected, and the boys themselves were well satisfied.

Then, the pistols being reloaded and placed in their belts, they resumed their march. They halted at a tiny hamlet, consisting of half a dozen houses, four miles from Thouars. The inhabitants were greatly surprised at their appearance, and an old man, who was the head of the little community, came out and asked Leigh who they were.

"We are Cathelineau's scouts," he replied. "We have orders to watch the movements of the enemy. We wish to be of no trouble. If there is an empty shed, we should be glad of it; still more so if there is a truss or two of straw."

"These you can have," the old man said. "If Cathelineau's orders had been that we were to turn out of our houses for you, we should have done so, willingly."

"A shed will do excellently for us. We shall be here but little. Half our number will always be away. If you can supply us with bread, I will pay you for it. If you cannot do so, I shall have to send two of my party away, every day, to fetch bread from Cathelineau's camp."

"I will see what can be done. It will not be for long?"

"No, it may possibly be only two or three days, and it may be a week."

"Then I think that we can manage. If we have not flour enough here to spare, I can take my horse and fetch half a sackful from some other village."

"Thank you very much. However, I think that we shall only occasionally want bread; for I shall be sending messengers, every day, to Monsieur Cathelineau, and these can always bring bread back with them."

The old man led them to a building which had served as a stable, but which was then untenanted.

"I will get some straw taken in presently, lads."

"As for you, sir, I shall be glad if you will be my guest."

"I thank you," Leigh said, "but I prefer to be with my followers. They come by my persuasion, and I wish to share their lot, in all things; besides, my being with them will keep up their spirits."

There was half an hour's drill, and then Leigh led the party to the shed, to which four or five bundles of straw had, by this time, been brought.

"Now," he said, "before we do anything else, we must choose two sub-officers. At times we may divide into two parties, and therefore it is necessary that one should be responsible, to me, for what is done in my absence."

"I will leave it to you to choose them. Remember it is not size and strength that are of most importance, it is quickness and intelligence. You know your comrades better than I do, and I shall be quite content to abide by your choice. I will go outside for a quarter of an hour, while you talk it over. I don't want to influence you, at all."

In ten minutes, two of the lads came out.

"We have chosen Andre Favras and Pierre Landrin."

"I think that you have done very wisely," Leigh said. "Those are the two whom I, myself, should have selected."

He had, indeed, noticed them as the two most intelligent of the party. They had been his first recruits, and it was in no small degree owing to their influence that the others had joined him. He returned to the shed.

"I approve of your choice, lads," he said. "No doubt Andre and Pierre will make very good sub-officers. When I am not present, you must obey their orders as readily as you do mine; and I shall be able to trust them to carry out my directions, implicitly."

"Now you will divide in two parties: the first two sections, and two of the third section will form one party, and will be under Andre's command, when acting in two parties; the other two of the third section, and the fourth and fifth, will form the second division, under Pierre. You will take it in turns to be on duty. We shall not need to watch by night, for there is no chance of the enemy venturing to enter our lanes, and thickets, after dark. The party not out on scouting duty will remain here, and will furnish messengers to carry news to Cathelineau, to fetch bread, or to perform other duties."

The next morning Leigh set out with the whole band, except two. He had gathered, from the people of the village, the position of the various roads and lanes by which troops, going westward from Thouars, would be likely to travel. When within two miles of the town, he placed two boys on each of these roads. They were not to show themselves, but were to lie behind the hedges and, if they saw any body of troops coming along, were at once to bring news to him, his own point being on the principal road.

Andre and Pierre were to leave their arms and belts behind them, to make a long detour, and to enter the town from the other side. They were to saunter about the place, listen to what was being said, and gather as much news as possible. Each was provided with two francs and, if questioned, they were to say that they had come in, from some village near, to buy an axe.

"I should have gone in myself, Andre; but although I can get on fairly enough in your patois, I cannot speak it well enough to pass as a native. However, you are not likely to be questioned. In a town crowded with troops, two lads can move about without attracting the smallest attention from the military. It would be only the civilian authorities that you would have to fear; but these will be so much occupied, in attending to the wants of the soldiers, that they will not have any time on their hands for asking questions.

"Be sure, before you enter the town, that you find out the name of some village, three or four miles on the other side; so as to have an answer ready, if you are asked where you come from.

"It is probable that you will find troops quartered in all the villages beyond the town, which could hardly accommodate so large a number as are there. Remember, you must try to look absolutely unconcerned as you go through them, and as you walk about the streets of the town. The great object is to find out how many men there are in and around Thouars, whether they are looking for more troops to join them from Saumur, and when they are expecting to move forward."

As soon as they had left he repeated, to the six lads who remained with him, the orders that he had given to those posted on the other roads.

"You are to remain in hiding," he said, "whatever the force may be. It is likely enough that patrols of four or five men may come along, to see that the roads are clear, and that there are no signs of any bodies being gathered to oppose their advance. It is quite true that we might shoot down and overpower any such patrols, but we must not attempt to do so. If one of them escaped, he would carry the news to Thouars that the roads were beset. This would put them on their guard—doubtless they imagine that, with such a force as they have gathered, they will march through La Vendee without opposition—and they would adopt such precautions as to render it far more difficult, than it otherwise would be, to check their advance when it begins in earnest. We are here only to watch. We shall have opportunities for fighting, later on.

"This is a good spot for watching, for we have a thick wood behind us; and plenty of undergrowth along its edge, by the road, where we can hide so closely that there will not be the slightest chance of our being discovered, if we do but keep absolutely quiet."

Three or four times during the day, indeed, cavalry parties passed along the road. They did not appear to have any fear of an attack, but laughed and jested at the work they had come to do, scoffed at the idea of the peasants venturing to oppose such forces as had gathered against them, and discussed the chances of booty. One party, of four men and an old sergeant, pulled up and dismounted, close to the spot where the lads were hidden.

"It is all very well, comrades," their leader said, "but for my part, I would rather be on the frontier fighting the Austrians. That is work for soldiers. Here we are to fight Frenchmen, like ourselves; poor chaps who have done no harm, except that they stick to their clergy, and object to be dragged away from their homes. I am no politician, and I don't care a snap for the doings of the Assembly in Paris—I am a soldier, and have learned to obey orders, whatever they are—but I don't like this job we have in hand; which, mind you, is bound to be a good deal harder than most of you expect. It is true that they say there are twenty thousand troops round the province—but what sort of troops? There are not five thousand soldiers among them. The others are either National Guards, or newly-raised levies, or those blackguards from the slums of Paris. Of the National Guards I should say half would desert, if they only had the chance, and the new levies can't be counted on."

## Chapter 5: Checking The Enemy

"You see," Leigh said, when the patrol had ridden on, "the real soldiers do not like the work they are called upon to do, and they have no belief in the National Guards, or in the new levies. It will make all the difference, in their own fighting, when they know that they cannot rely upon some of the troops working with them. I have no doubt that what they say of the National Guards is true. They have had to come out because they are summoned, but they can have no interest in the war against us and, doubtless, many of them hate the government in Paris just as much as we do, and would give a great deal to be back again with their homes and families. It is just as hard for them to be obliged to fight us, as it is for us to be obliged to fight them."

It was late in the afternoon before Andre and Pierre returned. By the time they did so, the various cavalry patrols had all gone back to Thouars. From time to time, boys had come in from the other roads. One or two patrols, only, had gone out by each of the lanes on which they were posted. It was evident that the main road was considered of the most importance, and it was probable that the greater portion of the enemy's force would move by it.

"Well, what is your news?" Leigh asked, as his two lieutenants came down from the wood behind. "I hope all has gone well with you."

"Yes, captain," Andre replied; "we have had no difficulty. The troops in the villages on the other side of the town did not even glance at us, as we went through; supposing, no doubt, that we belonged to the place. Thouars was crowded with soldiers, and we heard that two thousand more are to arrive from Saumur, this evening. We heard one of the officers say that orders were expected for a forward movement, tomorrow; and that all the other columns were to move at the same time, and three of them were to meet at Chemille."

"That is enough for the present, Andre. You have both done very well, to pick up so much news as that. We will be off, at once."

Messengers were at once sent off, to order in the other parties and, as soon as these joined, they returned to the village, where they passed the night. On arriving there, Leigh wrote a report of the news that he had gathered; and sent off one of the band, who had remained all day in the village, to Cathelineau, and the other to Monsieur d'Elbee at Chollet.

The next day's watch passed like the first. Two or three officers, however, trotted along the main road with a squadron of cavalry, and rode to within a few miles of Chemille, and then returned to Thouars.

The next morning Leigh and his band were out before daybreak and, making their way to within a short distance of Thouars, heard drums beating and trumpets sounding. There was no doubt that the force there was getting into motion. The band at once dispersed, carrying the news not only to every village along the road, warning the women and children to take to the woods, and the men to prepare for the passage of the enemy, but to all the villages within two or three miles of the road, ordering the church bells to be sounded to call the peasants to arms; while two lads started to carry the news to Cathelineau and d'Elbee. When once the bells of the churches near the road were set ringing, they were speedily echoed by those of the villages beyond; until the entire district knew that the enemy were advancing.

On the way from Chemille, Leigh had kept a sharp lookout for points where an enemy might be checked; and had fixed upon one, about halfway between the two towns. A stream some four feet in depth passed under a bridge, where the road dipped into a hollow; beyond this the ground rose steeply, and was covered with a thick wood, of very considerable extent. As soon as he reached this point, he set his band to work to destroy the bridge. As groups of peasants came flocking along, and saw what was intended, they at once joined in the work.

As soon as it was done, Leigh led them to the spot where the forest began, some thirty yards up the hill, and set them to fell trees. This was work to which all were accustomed and, as many of them carried axes, the trees nearest to the road were felled to fall across it; while on each side facing the stream, they were cut so as to fall down the slope, and so form an abattis.

Before the work was finished, to a distance of two or three hundred yards on each side of the road, several hundred peasants had come up. Of these, about a third were armed with muskets. Seeing the advantage of the position; and that, in case it was forced, the forest offered them a means of retreat, all prepared for a desperate resistance. The men with firearms were placed in the front rank. Those with pitchforks, and other rural weapons, were to keep at work till the last moment, cutting underwood, and filling the interstices between the boughs of the fallen trees, so as to make it extremely difficult to force. They were ordered to withdraw, when the fight began, to a distance of two or three hundred yards; and then to lie down, in any inequalities of the ground, so as to be safe from cannon shot. Only when the defenders of the abattis were forced back, were they to prepare to charge.

A young fellow with a cow horn took his place by Leigh's side. When he blew his horn, the front rank were to run back, and the reserve to come forward to meet them; and then they were to rush down again upon their assailants who had passed the abattis, and to hurl them into the stream.

The peasants all recognized the advantages of these arrangements. Those who had come first had found Leigh in command and, by the readiness with which he was obeyed by his own followers, saw at once that he was in authority. As others came up, he showed them Cathelineau's circular. These recognized its order, and informed the later arrivals that the young officer, who was giving orders, was specially empowered by Cathelineau to take command; and Leigh was as promptly obeyed as if he had been their favourite leader, himself. They saw, too, that he knew exactly what he wanted done, and gave every order with firmness and decision; and their confidence in him became profound.

It was three hours after he arrived at the river when a party of horse came down the opposite slope. Leigh had ordered that not a shot was to be fired, until he gave the signal. He waited until the enemy came to the severed bridge, when they halted suddenly; and as they did so he gave the word and, from the long line of greenery, fifty muskets flashed out. More than half the troop of horse fell; and the rest, turning tail, galloped up the hill again, while a shout of derision rose from the peasants.

Half an hour passed, then the head of the column was seen descending the road. It opened out as it came, forming into a thick line of skirmishers, some two hundred yards wide. Moving along, Leigh spread the musketeers to a similar length of front. At first, the enemy were half hidden by the wood at the other side of the slope; but as they issued from this, some twenty yards from the stream, a scattered fire broke out from the defenders.

The Blues replied with a general discharge at their invisible foes, but these were crouching behind the stumps or trunks of the felled trees, and the fire was ineffectual. Leigh's own band were lying in a little hollow, twenty yards behind the abattis; their pistols would have been useless, until the enemy won their way up to the trees, and until then they were to remain as a first reserve.

Exposed as they were to the steady fire of the peasants, the assailants suffered heavily and, at the edge of the stream, paused irresolutely. It was some fifteen yards wide, but they were ignorant of the depth, and hesitated to enter it; urged, however, by the shouts of their officers, who set the example by at once entering the stream, and by seeing that the water did not rise above their shoulders, the men followed. But as they gained the opposite bank, they fell fast. At so short a distance, every shot of the peasants told; and it was some time before a sufficient number had crossed to make an assault against the wall of foliage in their front.

Fresh troops were constantly arriving from behind and, encouraged by this, they at last rushed forward. As they did so, Leigh called up his own band; and these, crawling forward through the tangle as far as they could, opened fire on the enemy, as they strove to push their way through the obstacle.

For a quarter of an hour the fight went on. Then the assailants, having with great loss succeeded in passing over or pulling aside the brushwood, began to pour through. The moment they did so,



Leigh's horn sounded; and at once the defenders rushed up the hill, pursued by the Blues, with exulting shouts. But few shots were fired, for the assailants had emptied their muskets before striving to pass through the obstacle.

Leigh and his men had run but a hundred yards into the wood when they met the main body of the peasants, rushing down at full speed. Turning at once, his party joined them, and fell upon the advancing enemy. Taken wholly by surprise, when they believed that victory was won, the two or three hundred men who had passed the abattis were swept before the crowd of peasants like chaff. The latter, pressing close upon their heels, followed them through the gaps that had been made.

The panic of the fugitives spread at once to those who had crossed the river, and were clustered round the openings, jostling in their eagerness to get through and join, as they believed, in the slaughter of those who had caused them such heavy loss; and all fled together. The peasants were at their heels, making deadly use of their pitchforks, axes, and knives, and drove the survivors headlong into the river. The horn again sounded and, in accordance with the strict orders that they had received, they ran back again to their shelter; a few dropping from the scattered fire that the troops on the other side of the stream opened against them, as soon as the fugitives had cleared away from their front.

Scarcely had the peasants gained the shelter when six pieces of cannon, that had been placed on the opposite slope while the fight was going on, opened against them.

Leigh at once ordered the main body back to their former position, scattering his hundred men with guns along the whole line of abattis, whence they again opened fire on the troops on the opposite side of the river. These replied with volleys of musketry; but the defenders, stationed as they were five or six yards apart, and sheltering behind the trees, suffered but little either from the artillery or musketry fire; while men dropped fast in the ranks of the Blues.

The cannon were principally directed against the trees blocking the road. Gradually these were torn to pieces and, after an hour's firing, were so far destroyed that a passage through them was comparatively easy. Then the enemy again began to cross the stream.

As soon as they commenced to do so, Leigh called up the men with muskets from each flank, and sent word to the main body to descend the hill again, as the cannonade would cease as soon as the attack began. Three times the assault was made and repulsed, the peasants fighting with a fury that the Blues, already disheartened with their heavy losses, could not withstand. As they fell back for the third time, Leigh thought that enough had been done, and ordered the peasants at once to make through the woods, and to proceed by-lanes and byways to join Cathelineau; who, he doubted not, would by this time have gathered a considerable force at Chemille.

By the time that the Blues were ready to advance again, this time in overwhelming force, the peasants were well away. The wounded, as fast as they fell, had been carried off to distant villages; and when the enemy advanced they found, to their surprise, that their foes had disappeared, and that only some thirty dead bodies remained on the scene of battle.

Their own loss had exceeded three hundred, a large proportion of whom were regular soldiers; and the National Guards, and the new levies, were profoundly depressed at the result of the action.

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