

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

WON BY THE SWORD : A
TALE OF THE THIRTY
YEARS' WAR

George Henty

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of the Thirty Years' War**

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G. A. Henty

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PREFACE

MY DEAR LADS,

In my preface to the *Lion of the North* I expressed a hope that I might some day be able to continue the history of the Thirty Years' War. The deaths of Gustavus and his great rival Wallenstein and the crushing defeat of the Swedes and their allies at the battle of Nordlingen brought the first period of that war to a close. Hostilities, indeed, never ceased, but the Swedes no longer played the leading part on the Protestant side that they had hitherto occupied. Oxenstiern, the great chancellor of Sweden, saw that the only hope of eventual success lay in engaging France in the struggle, and he and the Duke of Weimar went to Paris and pointed out to Richelieu that unless France intervened, Austria must become the master of all Germany, and as the ally of Spain would have it in her power to completely dominate France. Richelieu perceived the opportunity, made a treaty with the Swedes and Weimar, and engaged to grant large subsidies to the former, and to send an army to cooperate with the latter. Then began the second period of this long and terrible struggle, France now taking the place that Sweden had hitherto occupied, and bearing the brunt of the conflict. She emerged triumphant with her territories largely increased, while Austria was crushed and humiliated, and Spain was dethroned from her position as the dominating power of Europe. The success of France was greatly due to the fact that her armies were led by two of the greatest military geniuses of all times, viz., Conde and Turenne, men of very different types, but equally great as commanders, and equally at the time of which we are speaking devoted to the cause of France. Both were men of extraordinary personal courage, and although one was as prudent and careful of the lives of his troops as the other was impetuous and careless at what cost he won his victories, they worked together with a harmony that could have hardly been expected among men so differently constituted. Although, in the subsequent wars of the Fronde they took different sides, their friendship, except during a short period of alienation, was never shaken, and their admiration for each other's genius never abated.

Yours sincerely,
G.A. HENTY

CHAPTER I: A STROKE OF GOOD FORTUNE

A mounted officer, followed by two orderlies, was proceeding at a brisk trot from Paris to St. Denis, in October, 1639, when he came upon a large party of boys, who, armed with sticks, were advancing in something like military order against a wall on the top of a low hill.

"What are you doing?" he asked the lad who appeared to be the leader.

"We are playing at war, sir. We are advancing against the fortress of La Motte. This is the regiment of Turenne."

"And who are you at other times?" the officer asked with a smile.

"My name is Hector Campbell, sir."

"Then you are not French?"

"No, sir; my father was an officer in the Scotch regiment. He was killed at the siege of La Rochelle."

"And who is taking care of you?"

"I live with Angus MacIntosh. He was a sergeant in my father's company. He was badly wounded at La Rochelle, and not being fit for further service, he took a cabaret near the barracks. The officers are very kind. They allow him a sum for taking care of me. Of course I am often in barracks, and have learned the drill, and I have heard and read about battles and sieges, so I am chosen to command."

"And so you know something of the battles in which Turenne was engaged?"

"I think I know about them all, sir, both in Holland and on the Rhine, and have seen plans of the battles. Of course this is not at all like La Motte, which was on the top of a high rock, so that when Turenne was ordered to attack with his regiment after the general's son had failed, he had to pass not only through a heavy fire, but through the huge stones that the enemy hurled down. It was grand; and he did well at all the other sieges. Then, again, there was Saverne. See how he fought there, and stormed the place when even the Swedes, who are good soldiers, had failed. I think he is going to be the greatest of our captains."

"Turenne is only a learner in the art of war," the other said gravely.

"I think he has learnt more than any of the rest," the boy said boldly; "and all the soldiers love him more than any of the other generals, for he takes such care of them, and does not treat them as if they were dirt under his feet, only meant to obey orders, and go and get killed when told."

"You have heard him very much over praised," the officer said quietly. "I think that he does his best; but he is a young man yet, not older than I am. His advance has been due to fortune rather than to his own merits."

"I don't think so," the boy said sturdily. "Do you think that he would be a lieutenant general at twenty-eight, and that all the soldiers would speak of him as they do, if it were only fortune? Look how he captured Landrecies and Solre, and drove the Austrians back from Maubeuge, and aided the Duke of Weimar to thrash them at Weilenweir, and stormed the main fort of Breisach! He has been successful in all his enterprises, and now it is said he is to command in Italy, where things have been going on badly. The cardinal would not have chosen him had he not considered that no one could do better than he."

The officer laughed. "Well, young sir, I see that you are so well acquainted with the sieges and battles of our time that I cannot argue with you."

"I did not mean that, sir," the boy said in some confusion. "I was only saying what our soldiers think, and it is natural that I, being only a boy, should make him my hero, for he went to the wars when he was a year younger than I am, and at fourteen carried a musket as a volunteer under Maurice of Nassau, and for five years he was in all the battles in Holland, and raised the first battery that opened on Bois-le-duc."

“And do you receive no pension as the son of an officer killed in battle?”

“No, sir. When the living soldiers often have to go months without their pay, the sons of dead ones can hardly expect to be thought of. But I don't care; in two years I shall be old enough to enlist, and I shall go to the frontier and join Hepburn's Scottish brigade, who are now, they say, in the French service.”

“They are fine soldiers—none better,” the officer said. “But why does not the colonel of your father's regiment ask for a commission for you?”

“The regiment is not in favour with the cardinal,” the boy replied with a smile. “They are too Protestant for his eminence, and the colonel is not a man to ask favours if he is likely to be refused.”

“Well,” the officer said, “it is clear to me that you are a lad of spirit, and that you have done your best to prepare yourself for your profession as a soldier by studying military history, and I think it hard that, as the son of an officer who died in battle for France, France should have done nothing for you. I have some little influence myself. What is the name of this cabaret that Sergeant MacIntosh keeps?”

“The Scottish Soldier, sir. It is near the gate of the barracks of St. Denis.”

“Do not go out tomorrow afternoon. I will have a talk with him, and maybe I can be of some assistance to you.”

So saying, he touched his horse's flank with his heel and rode on, while the boys continued their play. The next afternoon the lad remained at home, to the surprise of the sergeant.

“What keeps you in today, Hector? It is rare indeed that you are indoors in the afternoon.”

“An officer came along while we were playing,” the lad said, “and asked me some questions. I told him who I was. He said that he had some influence, and might be able to assist me.”

“What sort of assistance?” the sergeant grumbled. “He must have influence indeed if he can get you a pension.”

“I don't think it was that,” the boy said. “I said that I should like to enlist as a volunteer.”

The sergeant laughed. “Well, they do take volunteers as young as you are, Hector, but they must be cadets of a noble family. You will have to wait another couple of years before they will enlist you, much less take you as a volunteer.”

There were a good many Scottish soldiers sitting in the room, when an officer rode up to the door and dismounted.

“It is a general officer,” one of the men said, looking out of the window, and as the door opened and the officer entered, all stood up and saluted.

“Sit down, men,” he said. “I am not here to disturb you, but to have a talk with Sergeant MacIntosh. Have you a room, sergeant, where we can speak privately?”

“Yes, general,” the sergeant said, saluting again, and led the way into a little room generally devoted to the use of noncommissioned officers. The officer caught Hector's eye, and beckoned to him to follow.

“Do you know me, sergeant?”

“Yes, general, you are Viscount Turenne.”

Hector gave an involuntary exclamation of horror at the thought of the freedom with which he had the day before discoursed with this famous commander. Military officers at that time did not wear any set uniforms, and indeed there was very considerable latitude among the soldiers, and it was only because he was followed by two attendants that the boy had taken him to be an officer, probably a young captain. The quietness of his dress had not even led him to believe that he belonged to a noble family.

“This lad tells me that he is the son of Captain Campbell of the Scottish regiment?”

“That is so, general.”

“And also that you were a sergeant in his father's company, and have since taken care of him.”

“I have done the best I could for him, general; but indeed the officers of the regiment allow me quite as much as the lad's food costs.”

“He seems to be a careful student of military history, sergeant?”

“That he is, sir. I don’t think there has been a battle, or even a skirmish, in the past ten years which he cannot tell you the ins and outs of. He will sit here for hours as quiet as a mouse when some soldiers from the wars come in, and sometimes he gets books lent him with the plans of battles and sieges, and when he is not doing that he is in the barrack yard watching the men drill. I believe he knows all the words of command as well as any captain in the Scottish regiment. As to handling his musket, I have taught him that myself, and the use of a sword, too, since he was ten years old, and the men of his father’s company have taken pleasure in teaching the lad all they knew in that way.”

“He reminds me of my own boyhood,” the general said. “I like his looks, and it seems to me that he has the making of a good officer. All the officers of the regiment are men of good Scottish families, and as such can serve in any capacity. I have often need of a young officer who can carry my messages on a field of battle, and can be trusted to understand their import and deliver them faithfully. Now, Campbell,” he said, turning to the lad, who was standing with flushed face and eyes beaming with delight and gratitude, “I will give you the choice. I will either appoint you a volunteer for a year, in which time, if your conduct is satisfactory, I will name you lieutenant, or I will take you directly into my own household. My object in either case would be to produce an officer likely to be useful to his Majesty.

“I should certainly not have adopted that course had it not been that you appear already to have learned the duties of a soldier, and to be acquainted with the ordinary drill and with the necessities of a soldier’s life. If you enter my household you will find it no child’s play, certainly no life of ease and comfort. I do not spare myself, nor do I spare the officers immediately under me. In a regiment you would learn better, perhaps, the duties of a regimental officer, but with me you will have more opportunities of learning the art of war, and of some day becoming a distinguished officer, always supposing that you are not shot down in battle or die of fatigue and hardship. Which do you choose?”

“Oh, sir, how can I thank you for your goodness? There is nothing in the world that I should like so much as to be in your service.”

“So be it,” the general said. “I shall obtain an appointment for you as lieutenant attached to my household. At first, you will simply have to carry messages for me; but when I have learnt more of your character I shall employ you as one that I can trust.

“Sergeant, here is a purse, use the contents in furnishing the lad with clothes suitable for his position, and let him call on me in three days at the hotel of the Duc de Bouillon, where I am staying.

“Can you ride?” he asked suddenly.

“Yes, sir.”

“I will see to the matter of a horse for you. I shall be leaving at the end of a week to join the army in Italy. And remember always, lad,” he added with a smile, “that I am still but a learner in the art of war.”

So saying he nodded kindly to him and the sergeant, went out, returned the salute of the soldiers, mounted his horse, which his orderly was holding for him, and rode off.

“Well, well,” said the sergeant, who with Hector had followed him out, “the like of this I never saw before: to think that the Viscount of Turenne should visit the cabaret of a soldier, and should have deigned to offer you a position in his household! I can scarce believe that I am not dreaming. How did it all come about, and how have you thus gained his favour?”

“I am ashamed to say, sergeant, that I gained it by my presumption; now that I know who he was, I may say by my insolence. A party of us were having a mimic battle. We were acting as the regiment of Turenne at the storming of La Motte. I was in command, and so acting as Turenne, when a gentleman, who, by his appearance and age, and by the fact that two troopers rode behind him, I took to be a captain in the army, came up and questioned me as to what we were doing. I told him, then he talked about Turenne. I said I thought he was our greatest general. He, that Turenne was only a learner in the art of war. I upheld him, and spoke of the battles and sieges in which he had taken

part. Then he asked me about myself, and I told him my birth and bringing up, and he said he might be of assistance to me, and would call here and see you.”

“Well, well, it almost passes belief, Hector, that a boy like you should have dared to enter into an argument with an officer, even if only, as you believed, a captain. And to think that this has come of it, instead of his having laid his whip across your back, as you deserved. Your fortune is made, lad, that is, if you behave yourself. Turenne is a great soldier; and more than that, from what I have heard he is loved by his men more than any other general, and they will do anything for him. His regiment here, though he was but nineteen when he obtained his command, was admitted to be one of the best drilled and the best disciplined of any in the service.

“He saw to everything himself, spent his whole time in drilling them as if he had been only a lieutenant with nothing but his sword for his fortune, instead of a great noble. When he was with de la Valette and Weimar, and the army had to fall back and were well nigh starved, Turenne sold his plate and his carriages to buy food for the men. He had his own baggage thrown out of the wagons to make room for those who were too weak to march; and on one occasion gave up his own horse to a soldier who was sinking from fatigue and hunger, and himself marched on foot. He always leads his troops in battle, and wherever he goes they will follow. He was right in saying that he does not spare himself. The soldiers believe that he does without any sleep when on a campaign, for he is forever going round seeing that everything is in order, that the outposts are properly placed and vigilant, and that the soldiers have food, and such comfort as can be obtained. Now let us go in and tell my comrades of your good fortune. There is not a man in the regiment who will not be glad to hear of it. I will go across with you myself to the colonel’s lodging.”

“But please, sergeant, do not say a word about my folly; only say that the general, coming across a party of us playing at war, questioned me, and finding that I was the son of a Scottish officer who had been killed at La Rochelle, and that I had worked hard at getting up the history of the wars, and longed much to go into the army, had promised to come round the next day, and said that he might be able to aid me.”

“I understand, lad. Yes, it is better that your foolishness should not be known.”

The colonel was greatly pleased when he heard of what had happened.

“I had intended myself to have asked for a commission for you when you were a couple of years older,” he said to Hector, “but I was by no means sure of getting it, for the cardinal is not partial to the regiment. Turenne, however, stands high in his favour—in spite of the fact that his brother, the Duc de Bouillon, has left Richelieu’s party, and is regarded by him as an enemy—so we may be sure that your commission will be at once signed. You must sup with me and the officers of the regiment tonight. There is not one who will not rejoice that your father’s son has met with such good fortune, for assuredly you could not have entered the army under better auspices.

“It is just like Turenne to have thus come forward to assist the son of a brave soldier killed in action. As a rule, I am sorry to say that the officers of our army concern themselves but little with the affairs of the soldiers under their command. Of course in our regiment it is different, as we have many gentlemen of well known Scottish families serving in the ranks, and most of the others are our own clansmen, or come from our dales. We all cling together as countrymen among strangers, though indeed we can hardly regard them as strangers, seeing that Scotland and France have ever been allies, and that our Queen Mary was a French princess. And now that Scotland has given kings to England, and English troops fought side by side with the French under Henry of Navarre against the Spaniards and Guises, and, although not in strict alliance, are alike enemies of the Spaniards, we can scarce feel ourselves as strangers here. Besides, is not a French princess wife of King Charles?

“I do not say that either England or France has altogether forgotten the long wars between them, but that is a very old story now, and as long as Spain threatens to extend her power over all Europe, so long are we likely to remain good friends. If the power of Spain is once broken, old quarrels may break out again, but I trust that that will not be in my time, for assuredly the regiment, although

willing to fight against all other enemies of France, would refuse to march against our countrymen. Now, Sergeant MacIntosh, I know that you must be anxious to get back to your inn. You will have a busy time this afternoon unless I am greatly mistaken. Leave Campbell with me.

“In the first place, it will be as well that he should not be down there, for the fun is likely to get fast and furious. There is not a man in the regiment who knew his father but will be drinking the lad’s health, and it were better that he should go tomorrow through the barracks and shake their hands, than that he should be among them there. You can tell them that I have taken the boy off, so that they may not think that he stayed away on his own account. We will see him fitted out. It is a matter that touches the honour of the regiment that the son of our old comrade should make a fair show in the household of the viscount.”

“The general has left me a purse for that purpose, colonel.”

“It was a kindly thought, but let the lad start with it in his pocket. It is our duty to see that he has everything befitting his father’s son.”

As soon as the sergeant left, the colonel said, “Now, Campbell, do you go into the anteroom. I shall be ready to go out with you in half an hour.”

Orderlies were then despatched to the various officers’ lodgings, and in a few minutes they assembled. The colonel told them what had happened, and said that in his opinion it concerned the honour of the regiment to see that their comrade’s son was properly equipped.

All those who had known Captain Campbell were greatly pleased with the news, and there was not a dissenting voice when the colonel proposed that there should be a general subscription of two days’ pay. He himself, however, and Captain Campbell’s friends, gave a much larger amount, and the total was amply sufficient for the equipment of a young man of good family joining the army. Hector was then called in and informed of what had taken place, and heartily congratulated by the officers. He was greatly affected by their kindness and the proof of the estimation in which his father had been held.

“We had always intended to do this,” the colonel said, “when the time came for your entering the army, for we felt that it would indeed be a discredit to the regiment were you to go into the world without the equipment that a Scottish gentleman should have. Now, Captain Mackenzie and Captain Home, I will ask you to act as furnishers. You know what is required for a young officer on the staff of a general like Viscount Turenne, who would be called upon to accompany him to court, and must do him no discredit; besides which, he must of course have clothes for a campaign. He will not need arms, for I have kept for him his father’s sword and pistols. See that the tailors undertake to get his clothes ready quickly, for he is to accompany Turenne to Italy in four or five days. One suit at least must be finished in two days, for on the third he is to wait upon Turenne, who is staying at the hotel of the Duc de Bouillon, and he may possibly be presented to the cardinal.”

The dress of a French gentleman in the reign of Louis XIII differed but slightly from that worn at the same time by the cavaliers of Charles I. It consisted of a loose cloak of cloth, silk, satin, or velvet, according to the occasion and the wealth of the wearer. It generally hung loosely on the shoulders, but two or three of the top buttons were sometimes fastened; the sleeves were loose and open from the elbow. Sometimes the cloak was richly embroidered. Over it fell a collar of rich lace, with Vandyke border. Beneath it was worn a short tightly fitted doublet embroidered in front, with puffed sleeves, and with a belt or sash round the waist. The breeches were very full, reaching to the knee. For walking or riding, loose high boots turned down at the top and trimmed with lace or frillings joined the breeches; while in court dress, silk stockings and shoes with rosettes were worn. The swords hung from a richly embroidered baldrick going over the right shoulder.

Officers of the different regiments were distinguished by the colour of their sashes, which was the only point of regimental uniformity. When on a campaign doublets were usually worn of thick buff leather; armour was still used, but was far less cumbrous than it had been, consisting for the most part solely of shoulder pieces and cuirass, with plates covering the upper part of the arm, thick

buff leather gauntlets being considered sufficient protection below the elbow. Four suits were ordered for Hector: one for court, another for general use when in Paris or other large towns, the third for travelling and when in attendance with the general, the fourth for actual service in the field.

Almost as expensive as the suits were the shirts, with their deep lace collars and ruffle; while for service in the field half a dozen plain shirts were purchased. The headdress on ordinary occasions was a broad beaver hat with plumes, and in the field a close fitting helmet with cheek pieces. Visors had been almost entirely given up. On the third day Hector presented himself at the appointed hour at the hotel of the Duc de Bouillon. He was dressed in the second best of his costumes, and wore for the first time his father's sword. In the hall were numbers of soldiers and lackeys. One of the latter came up to him.

"I am here to see the Viscount Turenne by appointment," he said.

The lackey led the way to a large chamber, where several officers and gentlemen were waiting. Here Hector gave his name to a chamberlain, who took it into another apartment. He waited for half an hour, and observed that while the officers, one by one, were taken into the room where the lackey had carried his name, the nobles and gentlemen, who were much more numerous, were shown into another, which was evidently the principal reception room. He guessed at once that it was here that the Duc de Bouillon was receiving visitors, while his brother was engaged in giving interviews to officers, who perhaps desired appointments in his army, or in arranging details of stores, arms, and ammunition required for its use. At last his turn came; and on his name being called, he followed the usher into a small apartment, where Turenne was sitting at a table covered with letters. The general looked at him critically.

"You make a very good figure," he said, "and better, I can tell you, than I did at your age, for I was but weakly, while you are well grown and strong. Among your other exercises you have not neglected the use of your sword. I could tell that as soon as my eyes fell upon you."

"No, general, I have practised for two or three hours a day since I was ten years old, and I think that almost every soldier in the regiment has been my instructor in turn, and the maitre-d'armes of the regiment himself gave me lessons twice a week."

"I have managed your business for you," the viscount said. "I saw the cardinal yesterday and asked for a commission for you. He simply asked for what regiment, and I said that at present I intended to keep you about my own person, as I thought you would make a good officer and would some day do me credit. He was busy at the time, so he simply signed an appointment as a lieutenant and gave it to me to fill in your name. I asked if I should bring you to his levee tomorrow, but he said, 'There is no occasion, viscount, we have both plenty on our hands; neither you nor I can waste time on young lieutenants. You can present him to me when you return from the war.' You know the cardinal by sight, I suppose?"

"Yes, general, I have seen him many times."

"He is a great man," Turenne said thoughtfully, rather as if speaking to himself than to Hector; "the greatest that France has ever known—he is the soul of France. It is well, indeed, that we have at present a king who recognizes how great a man he is, and is wise enough to know that although he himself is somewhat overshadowed, France is made greater and stronger and his own reign more glorious by his genius." Then he broke off with a smile. "I was talking to myself rather than to you. I shall ride to St. Denis at two o'clock today; be here at that time. I will order the horse, that I have purchased for you, to be brought round here."

Hector was about to express his gratitude, but the general at once stopped him. "I need no thanks," he said. "I perceived in the ardour with which you have studied military matters that you would make a good officer, and you remind me of my own boyhood. I always like to help forward officers who I see ready, not only to do their actual business but to go beyond it, in order to acquire knowledge, and I doubt not that I shall find this in you. But you must remember, lad, that you are now no longer a civilian, but a soldier, that you must be not only obedient but respectful to those above

you in rank, that discretion as well as courage is necessary for success, that you must be thoughtful for the comfort of the soldiers, ready to expose your life in battle to encourage them, and also to set them an example of endurance, cheerfulness, and good spirits in times of hardship and distress. Remember that, to the soldier, there is no such thing as party; he fights for France and for France only, and should hold himself aloof from even the smallest expression of opinion on political matters. Then, at two o'clock."

Hector bowed deeply and left the room. When he returned to the hotel at two o'clock, six grooms were standing with the horses before the entrance; he waited outside until the viscount, followed by four officers, came out.

"Oh, here you are, lieutenant!" he said, as his eye fell on Hector; "I was afraid that punctuality was not among your virtues. Gentlemen, this is Lieutenant Hector Campbell, son of a brave officer of the Scottish regiment who fell at La Rochelle; he is, for the present, attached to my household, and will ride with us for Italy the day after tomorrow. Campbell, this gentleman is Colonel d'Estampes, who is the head of my staff; this Major Mutton, who will have the control of all matters connected with the artillery; these are Messieurs de Lisle and Emile de Chavigny, who are my aides-de-camp. Now, gentlemen, let us mount."

As the Scottish regiment was a mounted one, Hector had had ample opportunities to learn to ride well, and he now fell in with the two aides-de-camp, who were both young men of eighteen or nineteen years of age, members of good families, and together they followed the Viscount Turenne, who rode on ahead with the two staff officers. While they were making their way through the narrow streets of Paris they rode but slowly, but as soon as they passed through the gates they went on at a brisk pace.

"You are fortunate," de Lisle said, "in having obtained a commission so young, although I do not say that there are not many of similar age in the army."

"I am fortunate indeed," Hector replied, "fortunate beyond anything that I could have believed possible, thanks to the goodness of Viscount Turenne."

"You could not enter the army under better patronage," de Chavigny said. "We have both served under him for two years on the Rhine, and had we been his brothers he could not have been more kind; but the work, *ma foi*, was tremendous. The soldiers may well say that the general is sleepless. Happily he does not expect us to go altogether without rest. Frequently he is away all night by himself in the saddle, sometimes he takes one or other of us with him, but at any rate we get a night's sleep by turns. Much as he has to worry him—what with the ignorance of some and the carelessness of others—I have never seen him out of temper; but then a reproof, however mildly spoken, by him, is more dreaded than a volley of abuse from any other general. He was telling us before he came out that you are already well up in drill, and in the use of arms."

"Yes; I have been brought up, I may say, in the Scottish regiment, and after my father's death the officers and men were all very kind to me, and I learnt my drill both as a soldier and an officer, to fence, use my pistols, and ride. The officers lent me books on military history and tactics."

"The viscount said you were wonderfully well read in such matters," de Lisle said. "I own that beyond the campaigns that I have taken part in I have a very vague idea of such things. My time before I joined was taken up with learning the use of arms, equitation, and certain dry studies under an abbe. I wish now that instead of Latin I had learned something of military history; it seems to me that when one is intended for the army it is a good deal more important than Latin or theology."

"I fancy, de Lisle," his companion said laughing, "that from what I know of you your objection was not so much to the course of study as to study altogether. I know that that was my case."

"Well, perhaps so; still, I might as well have been whipped into learning something useful, instead of something that, so far as I can see, will never be of any value whatever. Were you born over here, lieutenant?"

“No, I was born in Scotland; but my father, who was a younger son, saw no chance of making his way by his sword at home. It was certain that James would never go to war, and as there was no regular army, there seemed no opening for a penniless cadet in England or Scotland, so he came over here and obtained a commission, and as soon as he did so sent for my mother and myself. She died two years later; he kept me with him. When he went on service I was left in the charge of a Huguenot family, and it was well that it was so, for otherwise I might have grown up unable to read or write. The last time that I saw him was before he rode to La Rochelle. After his death I was adopted by the regiment, for the good people I was with left Paris to join their friends in the south. Had it been otherwise I should have stayed with them. The good man would probably have brought me up to be, like himself, a minister, and I am afraid I should have made a very poor one.”

The two young men laughed. “Just at present,” de Lisle said, “the two religions get on quietly together. The cardinal, churchman as he is, knows that if France is to be great religious enmities must cease, and that the wars of the last reign cost tens of thousands of lives, and drove great numbers of men to take refuge in Holland or England, to the benefit of those countries and our loss. Still, his successor, whoever he may be, may think more of party and less of France, and in that case you might have found your vocation of a Huguenot minister as full of danger as that of a soldier.”

“It would have been much worse,” Hector said, “for it would not have been a question of fighting, but of being massacred. I know nothing of either religious disputes or of politics. In the regiment these things were never talked about, either among the men or the officers; all were for the king. But at the same time, as it seemed to them that it was the cardinal who had stopped the persecution of the Huguenots, and who had now gone to war with the Austrians to prevent the Protestant princes of Germany being altogether subjugated by the Imperialists, they felt grateful to him; for of course Scotchmen are all on the side of the princes, and nigh half the army of Gustavus Adolphus was composed of my countrymen.”

“I do not suppose,” Chavigny laughed, “that the cardinal would have cared very much for the destruction of all the Protestant princes of Germany, had it not been that their ruin would make Austria more formidable than ever. As long as Gustavus lived and the Swedes were able to hold their own against the Imperialists, France troubled herself in no way in the matter; but when the Swedes were finally routed at Nordlingen, and it seemed that the Imperialists would triumph everywhere—for most of the Protestant princes were leaving the Confederacy and trying to make the best terms they could for themselves—Richelieu stepped in; and now we see France, which for the past hundred years has been trying to stamp out Protestantism, uniting with Protestant Holland and Sweden to uphold the Protestant princes of Germany, and this under the direction of a cardinal of the Church of Rome. And here are we riding behind a Huguenot general, who perhaps more than any other possesses the cardinal’s confidence.”

“It seems strange,” de Lisle said, “but it is assuredly good policy. While fighting Austria we are fighting Spain, for Austria and Spain are but two branches of one empire. Spain is our eternal enemy. True, she is not as formidable as she was. Henry of Navarre’s triumph over the Guises half emancipated us from her influence. The English destroyed her naval power. Holland well nigh exhausted her treasury, and brought such discredit on her arms as she had never before suffered. Still, she and Austria combined dominate Europe, and it is on her account that we have taken the place of the Swedes and continued this war that has raged for so many years.”

CHAPTER II: CHOOSING A LACKEY

The policy of the great cardinal had for its objects the aggrandizement of France, as well as the weakening of the power of Austria. So long as the struggle between the Protestant princes and the Swedes against the Imperialists had been maintained with equal successes on both sides, he had been well content to see Germany watering its soil with the blood of its people. Nearly a third of the population had been swept away during the terrible war. Many hundreds of towns and villages had already disappeared, while large tracts of country lay uncultivated, and whichever party won a victory France gained by it. Her interest, however, lay with the Protestant confederation. So long as Germany was cut up into a number of small principalities, divided by religion and political animosity, she could count for little against a foreign enemy.

France had for centuries suffered from the same cause. The families of Lorraine, Bouillon, Enghien, Burgundy, the Guises, Longueville, the Counts of Armagnac, and other powerful vassals of France, paid but a nominal allegiance to the crown, and were really independent princes. Louis XI had done much to break their power. Richelieu continued the work, and under him France for the first time became consolidated into a whole. Had he lived, the work would doubtless have been completed, but his death and that of the king postponed the work for years. The long regency, controlled by a minister possessing none of the courage and firmness of Richelieu, and personally obnoxious alike to the nobles and to the population of Paris, again threw the power into the hands of the great nobles, plunged France into civil strife, and the wars of the Fronde, like those of the Roses in England, so weakened the nobles that the crown under Louis XIV became absolutely dominant.

Had Austria succeeded in crushing the Protestant princes, that empire, with all Germany under her control, would have become a power greatly superior in strength and population to France. It was principally to prevent this result that Richelieu after the battle of Nordlingen threw himself into the struggle, but his aim was also to carry the frontier of France up to the Rhine. Here the territories of the Dukes of Lorraine, and Bouillon Prince of Sedan, not only cut France off from the Rhine and the Moselle, but opened a door by which she could at any time be invaded from Germany. The Dukes of Lorraine had always borne themselves as independent princes, giving, indeed, a nominal allegiance to France, but as often allying themselves with German princes as with her. The Duc de Bouillon, on the north of Lorraine, and the Duke of Savoy, farther to the south, also regarded themselves as independent. The former, as Huguenots, had a strong leaning towards the Protestant Hollanders, and both were ready to furnish asylums to French nobles who had incurred the wrath of their kings or ministers.

The Duc de Bouillon, father of Turenne, had fought bravely on the side of Henry of Navarre through the wars of the League. He died when the viscount was but ten years of age, and, his elder brother being but six years older, his mother became regent of the little state. After having greatly weakened the strength of the Huguenot nobles by the siege and capture of La Rochelle, which had long been the stronghold and bulwark of that religion, Richelieu obtained from the duchess a treaty by which she engaged to remain always attached to the interests of France, while the king undertook to protect the house of Bouillon. The Duke of Savoy was next compelled to hand over to France the town and province of Pignerol, and Richelieu then turned his attention to Lorraine. The reigning duke had entered into an alliance with Austria, and the invasion of his territory was therefore the first step by which France entered into the terrible struggle known as the Thirty Years' War.

The duke had given Richelieu an excuse for hostilities. He had married his cousin, the nearest heir to the dukedom, but he treated her so badly that she fled to France and begged the protection of Louis XIII. This he gave her, a French army was at once set in motion against Lorraine, and it was in this struggle that Turenne had first fought under the French flag. He had always evinced the strongest predilection for the life of a soldier, and when he reached the age of fourteen, Richelieu

being at the time engaged in breaking the power of the Huguenots and in the siege of La Rochelle, the boy's mother sent him to his uncle Maurice of Nassau, who at the death of his father had become the leader of the Dutch people. He was treated by his uncle in exactly the same way as other gentlemen volunteers, carried a musket, and performed all the duties of a private soldier.

Six months later Prince Maurice died, and his brother, Henry Frederick, succeeded him in the government of the United Provinces. He at once promoted his nephew, and the latter speedily rose to the rank of captain of infantry. Here he was indefatigable in his duties, and unlike most young men of good family, who left the internal economy and discipline of their companies to subordinate officers, Turenne saw to everything himself. He drilled and instructed his soldiers, insisted not only upon strict military discipline, but on good manners and conduct in every particular. He won their respect and affection by his personal kindness, and denied himself almost the necessities of life in order to be able to add to their comforts. In the wars in the Netherlands there were few pitched battles, and the operations consisted almost entirely of the sieges of fortified towns or of measures for their relief.

In all these Turenne took much more than his full share, paying attention not only to his own duties but to all that was being done, spending his whole time in the batteries and the trenches, and in learning all that was possible of war carried on under such conditions. In the winter, operations were always suspended, and Turenne spent his time in Paris, where his manner and conduct won for him the favour of all with who he came in contact. He had been severely brought up under a Calvinist tutor; his habits were simple, his tastes quiet and almost ascetic, and he cared little for the amusements of the brilliant and corrupt court. When the war with Lorraine broke out, Turenne at once sought for employment with the French army.

He recognized that there was comparatively little to be done in the war of sieges in Holland, and longed to enter a wider field. His request was gladly granted, for the presence of the Duc de Bouillon's brother in the French army was in itself some guarantee of the duke's fidelity to his engagements with France, and Turenne was at once appointed to the colonelcy of a regiment. He devoted himself as assiduously to his work as he had done in Holland, and it was not long before his regiment gained the reputation of being the best disciplined in the king's service. He took part in a short expedition in 1630, but there was on that occasion no fighting, and he first saw real service under Marshal de la Force in 1634. After the siege of La Motte, the success of which was due to the storming of the breach by Turenne and his regiment, and for which exploit he was promoted to the rank of Marechal de Camp, a rank equivalent to that of major general, he took part in several sieges, until Lorraine was completely conquered and its duke driven to abdicate and retire to Austria.

The battle of Nordlingen showed Richelieu that if France did not resolutely enter into the conflict the Austrians would become absolute masters of all Germany. He at once signed a treaty with the Swedes, agreeing to grant them large subsidies to carry on the war. By a similar treaty he promised subsidies and the province of Alsace to the Duke of Saxe-Weimar. He entered into an arrangement with the Dutch, who were to aid France to conquer Flanders, which was to be divided between the two powers; while the Dukes of Savoy, Parma, and Mantua agreed to undertake, in alliance with France, the invasion of Milan, and to receive in return a portion of the territory won from Spain. At the same time France declared war against Spain. It was to the army commanded by Cardinal de la Valette, which was to act with that of Saxe-Weimar against the Imperialists, that Turenne was attached.

The campaign began unfavourably. The impetuosity of Saxe-Weimar, who hoped to recover his own principality, induced Valette to cross the Rhine; but he was forced to retire in all haste, and the army suffered terribly in the retreat. Turenne was in command of the advanced guard, and his courage and activity alone saved the army from complete destruction—seizing upon defiles, overthrowing the enemy who barred the passages, and enabling the army to recross the Rhine with numbers diminished only by sickness, fatigue, and hunger. At the siege of Saverne, Turenne led the French troops to the attack after three repulses, and succeeded in gaining a footing in the town, but received himself a very

severe wound in the arm with a musket ball. During the following year several towns were captured but no decisive operations took place.

In 1638, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar gained some great successes, defeated the Imperialists with heavy loss at Rheinfelden, and besieged Breisach, the key of southern Germany. The Imperialist army marched to relieve the place, but reinforcements were sent from France under the command of Turenne and Longueville. Three battles were fought and the Austrians driven off. After an assault by Turenne, Breisach capitulated, and all Alsace had now fallen into the hands of Saxe-Weimar. Having been promised Alsace he refused, as Richelieu desired, to hand over Breisach to France; but on the death of the duke in the following year, Richelieu bought over his lieutenants, the French flag waved over the towns of Alsace, and the Upper Rhine became the French frontier. Turenne returned to court, where he was received with enthusiasm, and was a short time afterwards ordered to Italy to assist De la Valette, who had been faring but badly there.

Matters had not gone there as Richelieu had calculated. The Duke of Savoy remained true to his engagement with France, but he died in October, 1637. The Spaniards had captured Vercelli, and the emperor had bestowed the regency of the duchy on the Cardinal of Savoy and on Prince Thomas, brother-in-law of the duchess. These, supported by the Duke of Modena and the Governor of Milan, the Marquess of Leganez, declared that they were determined to protect the people against the French and to deliver the young duke from French domination. The duchess implored help from France, and la Valette advanced to her aid.

While in Paris, Turenne had obtained from the cardinal permission to raise a regiment of dragoons and also that a company of dragoons should be attached to each regiment of cavalry. These troops were not intended to fight on horseback, but were, in fact, mounted infantry, an arm which, after being in disuse for many years, has lately been recognized as a very valuable one, possessing as it does the mobility of cavalry with the fighting power of infantry. It was at the head of this regiment that the general started for Italy. The position of affairs in Savoy was dark indeed, for the whole of Piedmont had risen against the duchess. Many considerable towns had been captured by the Spanish, others, including the city of Turin, had opened their gates to them, and with the exception of Susa, Carignano, Chivasso, Casale, and the citadel of Turin, the whole country was lost to her. The French forces were, however, too weak to take the offensive, and the ill health of La Valette deprived him of his former energy and rendered him unwilling to undertake any offensive movement. Nevertheless, Turenne's counsels infused a new spirit into the army, and indeed the news that the young general, whose name was already known throughout Europe, had arrived, and the belief that his coming would be followed by that of large reinforcements from France, at once reanimated the remaining supporters of the duchess and dispirited the Piedmontese, who began to fear that they had been too hasty in siding with Spain.

But if, for the time, Turenne was not in a position to act in the field, he began at once to take steps to prepare to meet the coming storm. Early in October La Valette died. The general opinion was that Turenne would have succeeded to the command, but his brother the Duc de Bouillon had broken with Richelieu and joined the party opposed to him. When in Paris, the duke had been on terms of intimate friendship with the Count of Soissons and had invited him to stay with him at Sedan. The invitation had been declined, but the count, having been implicated in a plot against Richelieu, had been obliged to fly and had taken refuge at Sedan, where he had been most warmly received by the duke. Richelieu had at first invited, and then in the name of the king commanded, Bouillon to expel his guest. This the duke absolutely refused to do, and becoming deeply offended at the manner in which he was pressed, joined the party opposed to Richelieu.

It was for this reason that the cardinal decided not to appoint Turenne to the command, knowing the warm affection that existed between the brothers, and fearing that Turenne might be influenced by Bouillon, and might, beloved as he was by the soldiers, lead many of the troops away from their allegiance were he to join the party opposed to him. He therefore appointed the Count d'Harcourt

to the command. He had proved himself a brilliant officer on many occasions, and Turenne did not feel in any way aggrieved at his being placed over him. He made a rapid journey to Paris to arrange with the cardinal and d'Harcourt the general plan of the campaign, and was now setting out again to make preparations for it.

Hector Campbell enjoyed the journey greatly. His duties were nominal; and the party always halted at towns, where the troops were billeted upon the inhabitants, and the viscount and his suite entertained by the authorities. After crossing the Alps, however, by the pass of Mount Cenis, and arriving at Susa, his work began in earnest. Turenne himself was almost entirely occupied in consultations with the duchess; his three aides-de-camp, however, were kept hard at work carrying messages to the governors of towns that still adhered to the duchess, with orders for the strengthening of the defences and for the collection of stores and provisions in case of siege. Each was provided with three horses, and almost lived in the saddle.

"You seem to be tireless, Campbell," de Lisle said, when it one day happened that all three were together at headquarters. "I feel as if I had not a whole bone in my body; as I have not had a whole night in bed for the last six days, I can hardly keep my eyes open, while you, who have been doing as much as we have, are going about as actively as if you had had nothing to do for a week."

"I have the advantage of riding so much lighter than you do," Hector said; "weight tells both on horse and rider, and when the horse is tired his pace soon adds to the weariness of his rider. If we had had to do this work when we first left Paris, I have no doubt that I should have felt it, but the journey here has been a fine preparation. Another thing is, that every morning I take a dip in the first mountain stream I come to, and that does one almost as much good as a night's sleep."

De Lisle shivered. "It may do good, Campbell, but I would not jump into one of these icy streams for anything. It makes one shudder to think of it."

"I always had a swim in the Seine every morning when it was not closed by ice," Hector said. "I was told that there was nothing braced one up and made one so hardy as that; and I certainly found that even in the coldest weather I never felt the need of a cloak."

"Well, I don't deny that it may be a good custom, and if all Scotchmen do it, it may account for their hardiness; but I like comfort when I can get it."

"But it is not comfort to be always in the saddle, and to feel so sleepy that you fancy that at any moment you may fall off. Even if a dip in snow water is, to those unaccustomed to it, somewhat sharp, it is better than having to struggle against sleep for hours."

"Well, possibly I may try the experiment some day when I feel that I must either lie down by the roadside and sleep or take a dip, but until I feel like breaking down altogether I shall postpone the experiment."

Turenne several times spoke approvingly to Hector. On one occasion, when the lad presented himself on being told that an aide-de-camp was required to carry a message, Turenne said to him: "But it is not your turn, Campbell; de Lisle and Chavigny both returned some hours ago, while it is not an hour since you came in."

"They are both asleep, general," Campbell said; "they have been thirty-six hours in the saddle."

"But you have been more than that, Campbell?"

"But I do not feel it, sir," he said. "I am perfectly fresh and ready to go on. I was a little tired when I came in, but I have taken a swim in the river, and am now at your service."

Turenne hesitated. "You see, sir," Hector went on, "being of light weight the horse does not feel it as he does that of a heavier man, his pace continues light and elastic, and his spirit good, and that makes all the difference to the fatigue of his rider. After two days' rest my horses are perfectly ready for another long day's work, while those of Chavigny and de Lisle start heavily, not having recovered from their fatigue."

"Very well, you can go then, Campbell. I am pleased with your spirit, and also with your thoughtfulness for your companions, who, although strong young men, do not seem to have your

power of endurance. I find, too, that you always carry out your instructions with intelligence, and that your reports on matters touching which I have sent you to inquire are always clear and full. It may be that ere long I may find employment for you in which courage as well as intelligence is required. There is but one drawback, namely, that you do not speak Italian. I know that there are few officers in our service who do so; but it would be so much the more valuable were you able to master it.”

“I had intended to study the language, general, as soon as I got here, but have had no time to begin it.”

“That you certainly have not,” Turenne said with a smile.

“Do you think that it would be of any use, sir, if I were to take a Savoyard servant? I find that many of them who come from places near the frontier speak French as well as their own language.”

“That would be useful, certainly; but you would have to be careful in your choice, and see that you get one whose sympathies are with the duchess; not only for your own safety, but because a chance word heard here, or an order given and conveyed to the Spaniards, might involve the loss of a battle.”

“I see that, general, and will be very careful.”

Hector had formed the acquaintance of several young officers attached to the household of the duchess, and on the day following his return from his mission he was supping with a party of four of them when he said:

“Can one of you gentlemen recommend a servant to me? He must be able to talk French as well as Italian. He must be active and intelligent. I should like him to be handy and accustomed to camp service, though this is not so important, for I want him as an interpreter before anything else. I should like him to be a lightweight, so as to be able to ride with me. He must be accustomed to fatigue, and he must have courage, for some of the journeys on which I may be sent will not be without danger, and of course he must be of the duchess’s party.”

“And I suppose,” one of the young men said, “that this Admirable Crichton of whom you are in search must be sober, honest, and truthful. Are you particular whether he is Huguenot or Catholic?”

“As to the last, not a bit. I should like him to be as sober as soldiers in general are, and if he confined himself to taking his wine when I did not require him, it would not be very important, provided that he is not talkative when in liquor. As to his honesty, he would have no great temptation so far as I am concerned, but I certainly should not wish to lose him by his being strung up by the provost marshal for robbing citizens. As to his truthfulness, providing he did not lie to me, it is a point on which I should not be particular.”

There was a general laugh.

“And as to his age?” the officer asked.

“If I could find all the qualifications that I require, I should not be particular about that; but I think that for choice I would take a lad of from sixteen to twenty.”

“In that case I fancy that I know a lad who might suit you,” one of the other officers said. “He is a brother of my groom, and I may own that he has been of no little trouble to him. The boy is an orphan, and having no other friends so far as I know, he has attached himself to his brother, and for the past two years, wherever he has gone Paolo has gone too. He earns a little money by doing odd jobs—running messages, and so on, helps his brother to clean the horses; and with an occasional crown from me, and what he earns otherwise, it cannot be said that he costs his brother anything in money; but in other respects he is always getting him into trouble, for he is a very imp of mischief. Two or three times his brother has obtained places for him, but he always comes back at the end of a week, and sometimes sooner, with bitter complaints from his master that he has set the household in a turmoil with his tricks and ill conduct. Many a thrashing has he had, but they do him no good.”

The others laughed.

“There is no doubt that Paolo is a perfect young imp,” one of them said, “but he is as sharp as a needle. I have no doubt that if he could be tamed he would make a most useful lad. As it is, I certainly would not recommend anyone who cares for his peace of mind to have anything to do with him.”

"I will see him anyhow," Hector said. "I think that I would rather have a sharp boy than a man. Being but a boy myself, I could appreciate and put up with more in the way of mischief than a man could."

"I will tell my groom to bring him round to your quarters in the morning," the officer said; "but mind, I in no way recommend your taking him. You won't keep him a week if you do."

The next morning Hector's orderly told him that a man desired to speak to him.

"Has he a boy with him?"

"Yes, lieutenant."

"Bring them in here, then."

In a minute a man entered, followed by a boy. The former was a good looking young Savoyard of some four- or five-and-twenty years; the latter was a lad of about the same height as Hector but somewhat older. He had black hair which fell over his forehead down to his eyebrows. His face bore an expression of extreme humility, which, however, was marred by the merry twinkle of his dark eyes.

"My master has bid me bring my brother with me, Lieutenant Campbell," the man said, "and I have done so, but I fear greatly that he will hardly suit you as a servant. I have obtained a dozen places for him, but he is always sent back at the end of three or four days, and I told him last time that I would never say a word in his recommendation again, for that it only gets me into trouble with the gentlemen."

"Well, that is honest," Hector said with a smile. "However, I will ask him a few questions. Now, Paolo, in the first place, could you be faithful?"

"I could be faithful to a master I loved," he said.

"In the second place, are you honest?"

"He is honest," the man said, "I will say that for him."

"Are you truthful?"

"I am as truthful as other people," the boy said.

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean, sir, that if I were asked a straightforward question I would give a straightforward answer, unless it were wiser not to do so. I would tell the truth to my master, but I do not consider it necessary always to do so to others. For instance, sir, if you were my master, and questions were asked about you, there might be times when it would not be convenient for you that I should mention where you had gone, or what you were doing."

"That is so," Hector said with a laugh. "The important thing for me to know is, would you always tell me the truth?"

"I think that I could promise to do that, sir, or at least to be very near the truth."

"You understand horses?"

"I do, sir."

"And you can ride?"

"Yes, sir, I can ride and run too. In a long day's journey I should get to the end on foot nearly as fast as you would on horseback."

"He can make himself useful on a campaign," the brother said. "He has been with my master and myself in the field for the last three years, and knows his work well if he chooses to do it."

"The principal point with me is that which I first asked him about, can he be faithful? I may have to ride on dangerous missions for the general. I may have to enter an enemy's town to obtain information. There is another thing, being of the general's staff, and sometimes quartered in the same house with him and chatting freely with his other aides-de-camp, secrets might be picked up by a sharp pair of ears that if repeated would do grievous harm to the cause of the duchess, as you can well understand. Now, the question, Paolo, is, can you be absolutely trusted; can you, as to all matters you may hear, be as one who is deaf and dumb?"

"I could, sir," the boy said earnestly. "I am all for the duchess, and I hate the Spaniards. I once was found out in a bit of mischief in the palace, and should have been whipped for it and turned out of the town, but the duchess herself said that I was only a boy and forgave me, and I would do anything for her. I would indeed, sir, and I swear that I would be always honest and truthful with you. I should like you as a master. You don't speak to me as if I were dirt under your feet, and I am sure by your voice that you would be kind. Try me, sir; my brother will tell you that I have never said as much before to anyone to whom he has taken me, for indeed I never meant to stay with them, preferring my liberty, rough though my fare may sometimes be."

"I will try you, Paolo. I believe that you are in earnest, and that I can trust you; but mind, there must be no monkey tricks here. The general must not be disturbed by the antics of a servant boy. You are likely, in my service, to have as much excitement and adventure as you can wish for, and you must behave yourself, for if you do not do so you will be lucky if you escape with a flogging and being turned out of camp. I am younger than you are, and am just as fond of a piece of fun, but I know when it is good to enjoy one's self and when one must put aside boyish pranks. I have my duties to perform, and do them to the best of my power, and shall expect you to do the same."

"I will, sir," the boy said respectfully. "I will give you no cause to complain of me, at least no wilful cause."

"Then that is settled. Here," he said to the boy's brother, "are five pistoles; see that he is decently clad so as to make a fair appearance by my side. When he is so, let him return here. It were best that he should come this evening, for it is likely that I shall be away on duty tomorrow."

"He shall be here, sir," he said, "and I thank you heartily for engaging him; and I do think that he means this time to behave himself."

"I do mean it," the boy said. "You shall have no reason to complain of me, sir."

Shortly afterwards Hector met the officer who had spoken of the boy.

"Well, have you thought anything more of young ne'er-do-well?"

"I have engaged him."

"You have, after the warning I gave you? Well, I hope you will not have reason to repent it."

"I do not think that I shall. I can quite believe that he is a mischievous young varlet, he shows it in his face; but I am sure that he is shrewd, and I believe that he will be faithful. At any rate I think that we took to each other, and that he has made up his mind to try for once to stay in a place. He really seemed in earnest about it, and if he keeps to his promises I think that he will be just the sort of lad to suit me."

"Well, we shall see," the officer said; "but if he turns out badly, please remember that I warned you against him."

"And if he turns out well," Hector said with a laugh, "I shall not fail also to remind you of your prognostications."

That evening when Hector returned to his room after he had finished his meal, he found Paolo waiting outside his door. His appearance had so changed that he would not have known him. His hair had been cut short in the front and left long behind, as was the custom of the day, hanging down on to his collar. He was neat and tidy. He wore a dark blue doublet reaching to the hips, with a buff leather belt, in which was stuck a dagger. His leggings, fitting tightly down to the ankles, were of dark maroon cloth, and he wore short boots of tanned leather. A plain white collar, some four inches deep, was worn turned down over the neck of the doublet, and a yellow cloth cap, with a dark cock's feather, was stuck on one side of his head. In his hand he held a bundle containing a leather jerkin and breeches of the same material, and a pair of buff leather riding boots that would reach to the knee.

"Your brother has laid out the money well, Paolo," Hector said, as he opened the door and led the way into his room. "I do not think that I should have known you."

"I am quite sure that I should not have known myself, master, if I had looked into a horse trough and seen my reflection. It will be a long time before I shall be able to persuade myself that

these clothes are my own, and that I really am an officer's lackey. Now, master, you must teach me my duties, of which I know nought when in a house like this, though I know well enough what they are when you are in the field."

"They are few enough at present, Paolo. Monsieur de Turenne's stablemen look after the horses of his staff. When I do not dine with him, I and my two friends, M. de Lisle and M. de Chavigny, dine and sup together at an inn. There is my room to keep tidy, my bed to make, my armour and arms to be polished, and my clothes to be brushed. Hitherto, my orderly has done these things, but it will now be your duty. As I do not eat in my rooms, it is clear that there is no food for you, and when we are in towns I shall give you money to pay for your meals at a cabaret."

"I hope, master, that you will soon find something more useful for me to do, for, in truth, I fear that with so much time on my hands I shall find it sorely difficult to comport myself as is due to your lackey."

"Do not fear, I have little doubt that you will soon find work enough and to spare, and indeed you will often ride with me."

Some few days later, the other two aides-de-camp being away, the viscount requested Hector to accompany him on a tour of inspection that might last two or three days. He was accompanied by his orderly and three other troopers, behind who rode two of his own lackeys with baskets of provisions. With them rode Paolo, Hector having asked the general if he should take him with him.

"You may as well do so, Campbell, it will accustom him to his work. What made you choose so young a servant?" he asked, as he rode off.

"He is a year older than I am, though perhaps not so tall. He is the brother of a man in the employment of Monsieur de Vevey. He has been through the last two campaigns. I find him very intelligent. He obeys my orders promptly, and as he is heart and soul in the cause of the duchess, I feel sure of his fidelity, especially as he has had a hard time of it up to now, and is, I think, grateful to me for taking him. He speaks French very well, and might certainly be of great use to me in any enterprise that your lordship might be good enough to entrust me with. Being about the same age, I think that we might perhaps go together unquestioned where a man would be unable to pass."

The viscount rode on for some minutes without speaking. "There is something in what you say, Campbell, and after this journey is over I may be able to employ you in that way when it is necessary to obtain information I can get in no other manner. Has he ridden with you before?"

"Yes, sir, he has ridden behind me each time that I have been away since I engaged him. When I say behind me, he starts behind me, but when out of town I call him up beside me, and we talk, or rather try to talk, in Italian—or rather I should say in Piedmontese, for he tells me that each district of Italy has its own dialect, and that the natives of one can scarce understand the other. I have bought a book printed here and a dictionary, and of an evening when I have no duties to perform he comes into my room, and translates sentence by sentence as I read it to him. I learn it by heart, and hope that ere long I shall be able to make myself understood in it."

"You do well—very well," the viscount said. "If all my young officers were to do the same, instead of spending the evening and half the night in drinking and gambling, things would go on much more smoothly, and there would not be so many blunders in carrying out my orders. You will greatly add to your usefulness by acquiring a knowledge of the language, and it would certainly enable you to carry out with far less danger such commissions as those you were just speaking of; for you might be asked a question, and if it were replied to by your lackey, suspicions would be at once aroused. You have ridden along this road before?"

"Several times, sir."

"Have you noted the features of the country—I mean from a military point of view?"

"I have nothing else to do as I ride along, sir. As I go I notice where an ambuscade might be laid, either by ourselves or an enemy, where we might expect to be opposed on our march forward, or where a rear guard might check an enemy were we retiring before him."

“Good! the fate of a battle depends in nine cases out of ten upon a knowledge of the ground, and in quickness in utilizing that knowledge. Our journey today is only taken for that purpose. I want to see for myself the country across which we shall at first operate, to inspect the various routes by which we might advance, or through which, if we find the enemy in too great a force to be encountered, we should be obliged to retire. As we go you shall point out to me the observations that you have made, and I shall be able to judge whether the spots are well chosen for the purpose.”

CHAPTER III: THE FIRST BATTLE

During the three days that were spent in reconnoitering the country Hector Campbell learnt more than he would have done in as many years under ordinary circumstances. Turenne took the greatest pains to point out to him how the nature of the ground could be taken advantage of, how flanks could be protected against attack by comparatively small bodies, occupying positions from which they could be with difficulty expelled; how important was the action of guns, especially when so placed as to be able to sweep the ground across which an enemy must advance in any endeavour to turn the position of an army. Turenne, on his part, took pleasure in instructing a pupil who was at once so eager to learn, and who showed himself so apt in profiting by his teaching.

"You see," he said, "I am concerned rather in defensive positions at present than in seeing how we could best turn an enemy barring our advance. Although the greater portion of the dominions of the duchess has fallen into the hands of the enemy, she is fortunate in that the few places that remain are those that at once enable her to make a defence with comparatively small forces; and at the same time, it is possible for her to receive aid from France, or, if absolutely necessary, for her to fall back across the Alps. Susa, her headquarters, lying at the mouth of the valley up which the road over Mount Cenis finds its way, at once guards the pass and keeps open communication with France.

"It is, as it were, the handle of a fan, and can be approached by three main roads only,—those to Turin, Carignano, and Chivasso. Unfortunately Turin is in the enemy's hands, but as the duchess's troops still hold the citadel, an advance could not very well be made until that has fallen. Chivasso and Carignano are safe from any sudden attack. There are other minor roads, but so long as these towns are in our hands and held by strong garrisons, an enemy advancing by any of these roads towards Susa would be liable to have their communications cut, and their convoys captured by parties from these fortresses. It has long been a fixed idea in military operations that an army cannot advance as long as a town near the line of route is held by the enemy. That idea is an erroneous one, and several times upon the Rhine we have gained successes by neglecting this rule and disregarding the towns, contenting ourselves with leaving a force sufficient to keep the garrison in check.

"The Spaniards, however, are slow to change their tactics, good soldiers as they are. The consequence is that, although greatly superior in force, last year they made no offensive movement against us. We have had several regiments join us since we arrived here, and although I believe the enemy's force to be twice as strong as our own, I have no doubt that the Count d'Harcourt will as soon as he arrives decide upon taking the offensive. You see our position here, guarded as it is on both flanks by the line of mountains, is as favourable for offence as defence, for we can advance either through Carignano on our right or Chivasso on our left; and however the enemy may dispose themselves they are vulnerable on one side or the other."

This anticipation was justified. D'Harcourt arrived three days later. A council of war was held, and it was decided that an advance should at once be made against the enemy. The main body of the Spanish troops were posted in a fortified camp at Villanova, halfway between Asti and Turin. Leaving only a small body of troops to guard the lower valley of Susa from an attack by the Spaniards at Turin, the army advanced to Carignano, and thence towards Villanova. The Spaniards, however, although nearly twice as strong as the French, were so much surprised at the boldness of this proceeding that instead of marching out to give battle they contented themselves with strengthening still further the defences of their camp, and in order to force them to come out d'Harcourt advanced to Chieri—called by the French Quiers—a town situated between Villanova and Turin, and about two leagues distant from each.

Turenne was in command of the cavalry, and took post between Chieri and Villanova. The Spaniards, however, made no effort to relieve the town, which capitulated after a resistance of only two or three days. While the siege was proceeding, a large convoy of provisions succeeded, unmolested,

in making its way to Casale, and thus placed the garrison there in a position to hold out for several weeks to come. But a very small store of provisions was found in Chieri, and the army was forced to fall back towards Carignano to obtain food from the stores collected there. The Marquis of Leganez, whose headquarters were at Asti, knowing that the French had sent all the stores they had brought with them to Casale, had foreseen that this would be the case, and advancing rapidly with the troops from Villanova seized Poirino, on the line by which the French would retire, while at the same time Prince Thomas, who commanded at Turin, advanced with the greater portion of his troops, and marched towards the little river Santina, intending to cross there. Thus the French army could not retire on Carignano without exposing both flanks to the attack of the enemy.

During the short campaign Hector had ridden behind Turenne, and shared in the general disappointment of the army when the enemy refused to accept their offer of battle, and still more so when after the capture of Chieri it became necessary to retreat. His two fellow aides-de-camp loudly bewailed the bad fortune that thus obliged them to retire without having effected anything beyond the capture of an insignificant town, which, however, had the advantage of opening a way for them into the heart of the country then held by the enemy.

"You seem to take it rather philosophically, Campbell," de Lisle said to Hector, as he remained silent while they were bemoaning their fate.

"I do not see that it is of any use taking it otherwise. At least we have had the satisfaction of bearding the Spaniards, who indeed seem to me to behave wisely in remaining in their intrenchments and waiting until they can unite all their forces against us. However, we have shown them that we are not afraid of them, and that even in the middle of November we are so eager to meet them that we have hastened to take the field and to strike a blow before winter sets in in earnest; but I think it possible that we may have a fight yet before we get back. Leganez has the reputation of being a good general, and he may yet combine his troops at Asti with those of Villanova and Turin and try to cut us off from Carignano." At this moment Turenne suddenly entered the room.

"To horse, gentlemen! News has come that Prince Thomas is marching at the head of three thousand foot and fifteen hundred horse to cut us off, and that Leganez is moving with all speed towards Poirino with the same object. Carry my orders for a thousand cavalry and as many infantry to be ready to march at once. We must be beforehand with Prince Thomas."

In ten minutes the cavalry and infantry selected were in movement, and Turenne, placing himself at the head of the former, rode on at a gallop, and keeping on at full speed with his cavalry, occupied the bridge before Prince Thomas came up. On his arrival, the latter, having with him three thousand foot and fifteen hundred horse, prepared to attack, but before he did so Turenne's infantry arrived. The Spaniards attacked with fury, but Turenne's troops stood firm and repulsed them, and as soon as they fell back charged in turn, broke the enemy, and drove them in headlong rout towards Turin. Prince Thomas himself was twice unhorsed and thrown into a ditch, but it was now almost dark, his rank was unrecognized, and he succeeded in making his escape and rejoining his scattered troops.

While this fight was going on, d'Harcourt had attacked the Marquis of Leganez and gained a considerable advantage, but not knowing how the fight was going on at Santina did not venture to advance towards the Po. As soon, however, as a messenger from Turenne brought him news that Prince Thomas had been defeated he continued his march towards Carignano. He was speedily joined by Turenne's horse, which took up the duty of rear guard and checked the Spaniards, who were pressing on in hopes of attacking the French as they crossed the river. He held them at bay until d'Harcourt had got all his guns and baggage wagons across the river, and then, following him, broke down the bridge and joined him at Carignano. Here the army went into winter quarters.

D'Harcourt, whose health was bad, retired to pass the winter at Pinerolo, leaving the command in the hands of Turenne, who again established himself at Susa, and began to make preparations for throwing a convoy of provisions into the citadel of Turin.

During the fight at Santina Hector remained behind Turenne, while the two young Frenchmen, carried away by their ardour, joined in the hot pursuit of the enemy. The prince, who had led the charge, had halted.

“Are you alone here, Monsieur Campbell?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Where are de Lisle and Chavigny?”

“They rode on with the cavalry, sir.”

Turenne frowned.

“You have done well to remain. An aide-de-camp’s place is to carry orders, not to fight. Now, sir, ride at once to the count. I hear his battle is still going on. Tell him that I have defeated and scattered the troops of the prince, and that as soon as I can gather my men I shall march to join him.”

Hector bowed, turned his horse and galloped off, while the general rode on, sending every officer he overtook in search of the cavalry with orders that they were to abandon the pursuit and return instantly. That evening after they had entered Carignano he called de Lisle and Chavigny into his room.

“Gentlemen,” he said, “you will have to choose whether you remain with me or join one of the cavalry regiments. If you remain with me, you must bear in mind in future that you are my aides-de-camp, and that your sole duty here is to carry my orders, and not to fight like troopers in a battle. It is through hotheadedness of this sort that battles are lost. A general, without officers to carry his orders, can do nothing towards controlling the movements of his troops in battle, of following up a victory or covering a defeat.”

The two young officers hung their heads and murmured their excuses.

“Enough, gentlemen,” Turenne said. “I am perfectly aware that it was your ardour that carried you away, but ardour is a bad leader. Over and over again the ardour of cavalry to pursue the troops they have defeated has brought about the loss of a battle. Courage is a virtue, and most soldiers possess it, but steadiness and coolness are rarer and more useful, and on the part of officers on a general’s staff are absolutely indispensable. I doubt not that you will remember this in future, and that I shall not have reason to complain of you again.”

The next morning it was Hector’s turn to be in attendance on the general.

“You behaved as I expected you would do,” Turenne said, when he entered his room on hearing the bell sound. “You fought close to me as long as there was fighting to be done, and I observed that you used your sword well. The moment I drew rein you did the same, and took up your post behind me, showing that although this was your first battle you retained your coolness. I will therefore tell you in confidence that Count d’Harcourt has enjoined me to throw provisions, if possible, into the citadel at Turin. It will take me some time to make arrangements, and my only fear is that the garrison, on hearing that we have retired across the Po—of which you may be sure the Spaniards will take care to inform them—may believe that we shall do no more this winter; and as we know that their provisions must be well nigh exhausted, they will abandon the citadel and march thither.

“It is now well nigh eighteen months since they were first cut off. It is certain that their investment is a very close one, and that the most vigilant watch is used to prevent news of any kind from reaching them from the outside. We have made several efforts to communicate with them, but without success. Some of the messengers we sent never returned, and were, doubtless, detected and killed. Others came back and reported their failure, saying that every avenue to the citadel was so closely watched that it was impossible to get through.”

“Have you any objection, general, to my mentioning this matter to my boy? I am absolutely convinced that he is thoroughly faithful and trustworthy.”

“You may do so if you like, Campbell, though it is hardly likely that he will be able to suggest any method of communication with the garrison that has not already been tried.”

“Thank you, sir.”

The general shortly afterwards went out to wait upon the duchess; in two hours he returned, and as soon as he did so Hector entered his room.

“What is it?” Turenne asked.

“I have been thinking about what you said about the garrison of Turin. I have been talking it over with Paolo, and have come to offer to do my best to deliver a letter from you to the garrison if you will do me the great honour to entrust the mission to me. We both think that two boys would be much more likely to succeed than men. No one would regard them with suspicion; and they could creep and crawl more easily. I do not say that we should succeed, but I think that we should have some chance of doing so. At any rate I am willing to try.”

“It would be a very dangerous expedition,” Turenne said gravely.

“Not more dangerous than going into a battle, viscount. Not a quarter as dangerous as storming a breach.”

Turenne smiled. “The idea has passed through my mind,” he said, “but I should not have proposed it had you not first spoken. It is the sort of mission in which I thought you could be made useful, but it is a rough adventure to begin with, and you must not minimize the danger. It is the duty of a soldier to run the risk of being killed in battle, but it lies beyond his duty to go into the enemy’s camp to obtain news. He may volunteer for it, but with a knowledge that if detected he would assuredly be hanged.”

“I do not think, general, that the risk of detection would be great, but the risk of failure would be so. If when we get there we can see no possible means of passing through the line of sentries, there would be nothing to do but to come back, and I own that in talking it over the thought that I might be obliged to return and to tell you that I had failed occupied a much larger portion of my thoughts than the risk of being detected.”

“But I shall not expect you to succeed, Campbell; the chances are a hundred to one against it. I should be glad, however, to have the experiment tried once again, so that if the garrison capitulates before we arrive to its succour, I shall not be able to blame myself for not having made one more effort to induce them to hold out for another few weeks. Have you thought of your plans?”

“Only so far, sir, that we shall dress up as two country boys, cross the Po, and enter the city from the other side. After that we must be guided by circumstances and trust to good luck. May I ask, general, if you have a plan of the city and fortress?”

“Yes; at least the duchess has one, which she has placed at my disposal. I can send an officer to the palace to request her to let me have it. No doubt it would be a great advantage to you to study the position beforehand.”

“Well, sir, we will see about getting our disguises at once.”

“I will give you an order on the paymaster for a hundred crowns for special service,” Turenne said. “It is as well to be amply provided with money, as it may be necessary to buy fresh disguises or to bribe someone to conceal you;” and he drew an order on the treasury and handed it to Hector.

“You will find the plan of the town in your room when you return.”

Paolo was waiting for him.

“It is settled, Paolo; we are to go.”

“This is an adventure after my own heart,” the boy said with delight. “It will be great fun to outwit the Spaniards.”

“Yes, but we must mind that they don’t outwit us, Paolo, which is quite as likely. Now let us talk of our disguises again. I think you had better go and buy them. I would rather get old ones than new. I don’t suppose that anyone is likely to take notice of me in the streets, but it would be well at any rate that we should not both have new clothes, and better that neither of us did so.”

“I can manage that, sir. There are shops here where one can buy old clothes as well as new ones. I noticed one the other day in a narrow street by the wall. I wondered then who would buy some of the garments hung up. They were so old and so often mended that it was difficult to say what was the

original colour. The people are very poor up in the mountains; since the war began, doubtless they have grown poorer, and are glad to buy anything that will cover them.”

“Well, here are ten crowns.”

“They won’t cost half that, master, but I will take them.”

“Mind and get something warm, Paolo; it is like enough that we shall have to sleep more than once in the open air, and the winds are bitterly cold.”

In half an hour the officer came with the plan, which Hector at once set to to study. The citadel stood on ground but little, if at all, higher than that upon which the town was situated. It was pentagonal in form, and was built in 1565, and was the earliest fortification in Europe in this style, and was considered a masterpiece. It was separated from the town by its glacis. A deep fosse ran along the foot of the wall. The town itself was walled, and extended to the foot of the citadel, and was capable of offering a sturdy resistance even after the citadel had fallen, just as the citadel could protect itself after the capture of the town by an enemy. Hector examined carefully that portion of the town facing the citadel, and took notes of the streets that ran through to the walls, specially noting those which extended farthest from the wall before being broken by cross lanes.

It was evident from the width of the streets that this was the poorest quarter of the town, for the wealthy would not care to build their houses in a position where, if the town and citadel were hostile to each other, they would be exposed to the fire of the latter’s guns.

In another half hour Paolo returned with a large bundle. It contained two coarse cotton shirts, two warm garments resembling waistcoats, and fastened by strings closing up to the neck, two red sashes of coarse flannel, and two loose doublets reaching down to the hips. These were worn and patched, but had been newly lined with sheepskin. The breeches, which reached down to the knee, were of coarse brown cloth; to cover the leg below the knee were bands of gray flannel which were wrapped round and round the leg and foot, while over these were worn wooden shoes. The hats were of conical shape with wide brims, and both, like the clothes, bore signs of long wear.

“It could not have been better, Paolo,” Hector said as he examined them. “I have seen scores of boys so dressed, and we shall certainly attract no attention by our garb. They are warm, too, and we sha’n’t come to any harm from sleeping out in them.”

“They cost more than I expected, master, owing to the doublets being freshly lined, but I thought it would be worth it.”

“Quite right! those sheepskins will be most useful. There is one thing more we shall want, a thin rope, that will bear our weight well, some twenty yards long. You had better go to a smith’s and get him to make a strong iron hook, by which we can fix the rope on to the edge of a wall should it be needed. You had better have it made a good nine inches across the hook, and the shank fifteen inches long.”

After again studying the map he took it to the general.

“We have our disguises, sir, and shall be ready to start tomorrow morning.”

“You have lost no time,” the general said approvingly. “You will, of course, ride to Chivasso. I will give you an order to the governor there, to take charge of your horses and clothes, telling him that you are about to proceed on a mission in disguise, and requesting him to send an officer to pass you through the outposts beyond the bridge across the Po, that is if the other side is not guarded by the Spanish troops. I should advise you to make straight south so as to strike the road from Casale two miles west of Turin. I do not like letting you go, lad, and yet I feel it is of such importance that the garrison should know that aid will be at hand before long, that I feel I ought not to prevent you from carrying out your enterprise. When do you think of starting?”

“At eight in the morning, sir. If we do so we shall easily reach Chivasso before dark, and may be near Turin by morning.”

“I will have my note for the commandant ready by the time your horses are at the door. I will make it as small as possible, and you had better before you start sew it up in the lining of your coat,

so that if you are searched—which I own I do not think to be likely, unless in some other way you excite the suspicions of the Spaniards—it may not be found upon you.”

“I think, sir, that I would rather make it into a little pellet which I can swallow. I fancy that if they were suspicious enough to search me they would rip all the linings open.”

“That would be a better way certainly, Campbell; I see that you have thought the matter over thoroughly. Of course, you will take no arms with you.”

“Nothing but a long knife each. Every peasant carries one, and it may be possible that we shall be compelled to silence a sentinel. If you would not mind, sir, I should like to have six copies of your letter to the commandant. I could manage to swallow six as well as one, and as it is not likely that I shall be able to enter the citadel it would be as well to give them a better chance of finding the letter if I have to try to shoot or throw it in.”

“That shall be done; we will use the thinnest paper, so that if you have to swallow them you can do so without difficulty.”

“If I find that I cannot by any possibility get my message in through the town, sir, I shall try to cross the river and so make my way in on that side.”

“That would be even more dangerous than the other,” Turenne said. “On that side an even stricter watch is likely to be kept than on that facing the town, for the Spaniards know that the garrison is not strong enough to attempt any enterprise against the city, while it might at any moment attempt to break out and march away on the other side.

“I own that I do not see myself how you can possibly succeed in either case, but assuredly there must be more chance on the side of the town. I have been thinking it over, and will order a troop of cavalry to ride with you to Chivasso, for the Spanish horse from time to time make forays from Turin, carry off prisoners, and burn villages. Until we are in a position to make a general advance it is impossible to check these attacks without keeping the whole of our cavalry massed near Turin, and wearing out horses and men by the necessity for perpetual vigilance. And now, goodbye; may fortune attend you! Do not be too rash. The letters shall be sent you in an hour’s time.”

As they issued out from Susa they found the troop of cavalry awaiting them. The officer in command was well known to Hector, and said:

“So it is you that I am to escort to Chivasso, Monsieur Campbell?”

“Yes; I am sorry to give you occasion for so much trouble.”

“No trouble at all; we have not been in the saddle for the past week, and a ride to Chivasso will make a pleasant change. Besides, I have a brother in the garrison there, so that altogether I shall be your debtor. You see, we are not allowed to ride beyond St. Ambrogio, or Rivoli at farthest, for once beyond that, we should be liable to be caught by the enemy’s scouting parties. Of course we have a strong force at Rivoli, but except to drive off small parties of the enemy who may venture to come up too close, they are forbidden to engage in any affairs. It is annoying, but one can understand that the general is anxious to avoid encounters in which the enemy is sure to be superior in force, until his reinforcements come up and we are able to take the field in earnest.”

“I do not think we shall be otherwise than inferior in force even when our last regiment comes up,” Hector said. “What with Holland and the Rhine and the frontier of Spain, it is clear that the cardinal must have as much as he can do to enable all our commanders to make head against the enemy, and it is no secret that beyond one more regiment of cavalry that will arrive with Count d’Harcourt, no other reinforcements are likely to reach us for some time to come. But then, you see, we have Turenne as well as d’Harcourt, and each of them ought to count for two or three thousand men.”

“Well, I would rather fight against long odds,” the officer said, “than be kept here month after month doing nothing. Here is winter coming on, and I suppose that will put a stop to everything.”

“I should hardly think so,” Hector replied. “I am sure that the viscount is as eager for action as we are, and winter here is not the same thing as in Holland or on the Rhine. From what I hear there

is very little snow in the plains; and as the country is generally flat, an army could march almost as easily as in summer, and in some respects they would be better off.”

“How do you mean?”

“I mean that in summer the barns would be all empty of food until filled again by the harvest, whereas in winter they would be all well stocked with forage for the cattle and horses.”

“You are right, Monsieur Campbell. Certainly there should be nothing to prevent our operating through the winter, and I shall look forward even more eagerly than I did before for d’Harcourt’s return. Will you come back with us tomorrow from Chivasso?”

“That will depend upon circumstances. I think it is more probable that I shall not return to Susa for a few days; my orders are to report myself to the governor.”

No bodies of the enemy’s cavalry were met with on the way, and at four o’clock in the afternoon they rode into Chivasso. They alighted at the commandant’s, and on stating that he was the bearer of a despatch from the general Hector was at once shown in. As he had more than once ridden there with despatches from Turenne, he was known to the officer.

“We heard of the victory three days since,” the latter said, as Hector handed him the despatch, “and fired a salvo of guns in honour of it. An Italian deserter from the other side brought the news. The two generals were unwounded, I hope?”

“Yes, colonel, and our losses were altogether slight.”

The commandant opened the despatch. He looked a little surprised at its contents. “So you are going to endeavour to pass a message into the citadel. It is a difficult undertaking. The enemy’s watch is a very vigilant one. Once or twice during the siege men have succeeded in swimming the Po and evading the enemy’s guards, but of late these have been doubled, for it is thought that the garrison may attempt to break out. On the town side the firing has all but ceased; they know that the store of provisions is almost exhausted, and regard it as a waste of powder and shot to continue their cannonade, which only results in the citadel answering it, and that with very much more effect than the Spanish guns produce. May I ask if you have any plan of getting in?”

“No, sir, we must decide upon that when we see how matters stand.”

“Who is the we?” the colonel asked.

“Myself and my servant, who is a very sharp and intelligent lad whom I can thoroughly trust. Alone I could do nothing, for I have only picked up a few phrases in Italian yet, and should be detected at once; so anything that has to be said must be said by him. May I ask, sir, if the enemy are in force on the other side of the bridge? if so, we must cross by swimming, either above or below it.”

“No; there was a regiment there until three days ago, but they marched away, and no doubt formed a portion of Prince Thomas’s force. They know well enough that although our garrison can hold the walls, we are not strong enough to undertake any enterprise.”

“Then, sir, we have only to ask for an escort for a mile or so beyond the other side of the bridge, in case a company should have been left to watch the road. Beyond that we will dismount and proceed on foot. We will, if you please, put on our disguises here, with the exception of our hats, and perhaps you will lend us a couple of long cloaks, so that our appearance may not be noticed. Although we shall not start until after dark, it is as well to be upon the safe side. Maybe the enemy have spies in the town, and were it noticed that two young peasants rode out under the escort of a troop of cavalry news might be sent to Turin. In that case we might be arrested as soon as we entered the city. I should be obliged if you would give orders to the officer in command that one of the troopers should bring the horses, cloaks, and hats back here with him.”

The governor rang a bell, and on an orderly entering said: “Tell Captain Sion to have his troop in readiness to start in an hour’s time, in order to form an escort for one of Viscount Turenne’s officers, and tell him that when he has the troop ready to start he is to come to me for detailed orders. I have said an hour, Monsieur Campbell,” he went on, after the orderly had left the room, “because, in the first place, it is not yet dark, and in the second, it will take some twenty minutes to prepare a meal.

You will have a long night's work before you, and I dare say you have had nothing since you halted for breakfast.”

“Thank you, colonel, I had not thought of it; but I should certainly have remembered it before tomorrow morning. We halted for breakfast at eleven, and if it had not been for your kind offer we should have had no chance of getting anything till we entered Turin, and even there the less we go into any cabarets the better.”

“That is true. I have sent a message to the cook that twenty minutes is the utmost we can give for the preparation of a meal.”

CHAPTER IV: SUCCESS

Although the governor apologized to Hector for the poorness of the repast and the haste with which it had been prepared, it was really excellent, consisting of soup, some fish fresh from the river, a cutlet, and an omelette, with a bottle of good wine of Asti. Paolo's wants had been attended to in the kitchen. It was six o'clock when they started. The officer in command had already received his instructions, and the governor accompanied Hector to the door, where two horses were standing saddled.

"They are not your own," he said, "but are two of mine. I thought that yours had made a sufficiently long journey today."

Thanking him for his kindness, Hector mounted, and took his place by the side of Captain Simon, while Paolo fell in with the orderlies riding close behind.

"I presume, monsieur, that you are going to obtain some information for Viscount Turenne. I don't want to ask any questions as to the nature of your mission, but as I have orders to bring back with the horses your cloaks and hats, I presume that in the first place you are going on foot, and in the second, you are going in disguise."

"Your judgment is correct, captain. The viscount wishes to obtain certain information, and I am going to fetch it for him, if I can."

"I hope that you will be successful, sir. It is a good night for travelling, the stars are bright and the moon down, so that you will have light enough to keep the road, and time enough to step aside should you meet any party who might be inclined to question all passersby."

"Do you know the roads well about here?" Hector asked.

"I was stationed in Turin before the enemy came with too great a force to be resisted."

"I want to strike across the country, and to come into the road from Turin to Casale at a distance of three or four miles from the city."

"A mile or so away a road branches off from this which keeps by the river. It is a mere country road, and except in two or three small villages that you will pass through, you are not likely to meet with anyone upon it. It is about eight miles to the main road from the point where you turn off, and you will then be five miles from Turin. It is just possible that you may meet patrols, but I should think it very unlikely; now that our army has gone into winter quarters at Carignano, they are not likely to be very vigilant."

As they rode along Hector related some of the incidents of the late battle. No signs of the enemy were met with, and the officer presently said, "I am sorry to say that this is the point where you leave us, monsieur. I wish it had been a little farther, so that I could hear more of the fight."

Hector and Paolo dismounted. Two troopers were called up and took charge of their horses, while the cloaks and hats were given to the officer's orderly, then the two lads put on the Savoyard hats they had carried under their cloaks. The officer took two packets from his holster.

"The colonel bade me give this to you at starting," he said. "He thought that after a long walk on foot you would want some slight refreshment before the inns were open in the morning."

"Will you please give him my hearty thanks for his thoughtfulness," Hector said, "and accept the same yourself for your courtesy in escorting me."

"Now we are fairly on our way, Paolo," he went on as he turned down the lane, for it was little more; "this package is a bottle of wine, and the one that I have handed to you contains the eatables."

"That is good, master. We shall find it pretty cold before morning, and there is nothing like a good meal to warm one up again."

"Did you get the bow and arrows at Chivasso?"

"Yes, sir. I went out and bought them as soon as we got there. I wanted them, I told the man, for a boy of ten years old, but all he had were a good deal too long, which I was glad of, for a child's

bow would hardly have been strong enough, so I made him cut one down until it was not more than three feet long. That way I shall be able, as we agreed, to carry it under my doublet. Of course it will make me walk stiffly, and there will be no possibility of sitting down, but that matters not at all. It is all the stronger, and will send an arrow a good distance. I have got six arrows as you ordered me. They are regular arrows, but I made the man shorten them so as to suit the bow, and then repoint them. I have got them inside my doublet. I tied them together, made a hole in the lining under the arm, and put them in.”

“You have not forgotten the cord, I hope, Paolo?”

“Not I, master. I should have deserved having my ears cut off if I had done so.”

They were in no hurry, and walked only fast enough to keep themselves warm. In two hours and a half they arrived at the main road and turned to the right. “Now we will go another couple of miles, Paolo, and then look out for a sleeping place. An empty barn or stable or a stack of fodder is what we want. We may as well sleep warm as cold. We shall not want to be moving on till seven o’clock.”

After walking three miles they came upon a small village.

“Do you stay here, master, I will go round and see if I can find a place. I am more accustomed to these villages than you are.”

In five minutes he returned. “I have found a capital place,” he said. “It is a stable, but it is empty. No doubt the Spaniards have taken the horses, and are using them in their transport wagons.”

“It is enough for us that the place is empty, Paolo.”

The door stood ajar. They entered and closed it behind them, and they then felt about until they found a pile of rough fodder. They pulled some of this aside, lay down and covered themselves up with the stalks they had removed, and in three minutes were fast asleep, for they had had a long day’s work. Hector slept until he was awakened by Paolo, who said, “The day is breaking, and the village will be astir in a few minutes.” The weather had changed, and as they stepped out fine flakes of snow were drifting through the air, and the ground was already whitened. They regained the road and walked along until they came to a wood.

“We may as well wait here and breakfast, Paolo.” The parcel was opened and found to contain a cold capon and some bread, and on these and the wine they made a capital breakfast, each taking a long sip at the bottle to the health of the colonel. “The market people are beginning to come along, and we may as well buy something from them going in. If we have not something to sell it is not unlikely that we shall be asked questions.” It was now broad daylight, and they saw several peasants pass along the road, some with baskets, others driving a pig or a goat.

“Either of these would do,” Hector said; “but we don’t know where the market is, and it would never do to seem ignorant of that.” The snow had stopped suddenly some minutes before, and the sun was now shining.

“That is lucky,” Hector said as they walked down towards the road, “we may hope that there will be no more snow and that the sun will soon melt what has fallen. It would be fatal to us if the ground were white, for the most careless sentry could not help seeing us upon it.”

They reached the road just as a peasant came along. He was an old man, and was dragging behind him a pile of faggots, which were placed upon two rough poles. He was walking between these, holding two ends in his hands, while the others trailed along on the ground behind.

“Bargain with him, Paolo.”

“That is a heavy load, father,” the latter said.

“Ay, it is heavy.”

“How much do you expect to get for your faggots in the town?”

“I shall get a crown,” the man said. “I would not take under, and they ought to be worth more than that now the snow has begun to fall.”

“We are going into the town,” Paolo said. “We are younger than you, and between us we could drag it along easily. I have got a crown in my pocket to buy some things with. I don’t mind giving it to

you for your load. If I can sell the faggots for a few soldi over that we shall be able to buy something for ourselves.”

“It is a bargain, lad,” the old man said. “I am getting old and the rheumatism is in my bones, and I shall be very glad to be spared the journey; so give me your money and take the poles. I hope you will be successful, and sell them a little higher. You had better ask a crown and a half. The women are sure to beat you down, but you will make ten or twelve soldi for yourselves.”

Paolo handed the crown to the old man.

“How had we better take this, Paolo?” Hector asked, as the old man, chuckling with satisfaction at having escaped a toilsome journey, turned to retrace his steps.

“There is room for us both between the shafts,” Paolo said, “one behind the other. It would be much easier to walk holding both poles than for us both to take one, as in that way the weight will be balanced on each side of us.”

There was indeed just room between the ends of the poles and the pile of brushwood for them to walk close behind each other, and as the greater portion of the weight rested on the other ends of the poles they did not find the burden a heavy one.

“How are we going to sell these, Paolo?”

“We shall have no difficulty in selling them, master. This frost will set every housewife on the lookout for wood, and you will find that we sha’n’t have to go far before we are accosted.”

It was two miles from the spot where they had bought the faggots to the gates of Turin.

“I sha’n’t be sorry to get rid of this load,” Hector said. “It is not the weight but the roughness of the poles. My hands are quite chafed by them.”

“Loose your hold for a bit, master. My hands have been accustomed to rough work, and many a load of faggots have I drawn in my time.”

“I will hold on, Paolo. It is not more than a quarter of a mile farther. My hands have done plenty of work, too, but it has been done with smooth handled weapons. It is well that they should become accustomed to harder work.”

They passed without a question through the gate, and following the example of other vendors of wood, of whom they saw several, Paolo began to shout, “Large faggots for sale!”

It was not long before a door opened and a woman beckoned him.

“How much do you want for the whole?”

“A crown and a half,” Paolo said.

“I have been offered as many for a crown,” the woman replied.

“Then, signora, you did wrong to refuse. It took two days’ work to cut them, and we have dragged them here for miles. Two crowns would not pay for the labour. Not one scudo would I take under the price that I have named. Why, if the town is besieged these faggots would be worth twenty crowns before the winter is over.”

“Well, I will give you the money,” the woman said. “It is extortionate. Generally I can buy them at half that price.”

“I do not say no to that,” Paolo laughed, “but with two armies wanting firewood and cutting down the copses without even taking trouble to ask leave of their owners, I think that you will see firewood very scarce in the city before long.”

“Well, carry it in and pile it in the yard.”

This was soon done, the poles were thrown on to the top of the heap, and the boys went off along the street again.

“We have made half a crown for ourselves,” Paolo laughed; “now we must decide how we shall spend it.”

“It would be a good plan to spend some money anyhow,” Hector said. “What kind of things would you be likely to buy for your family in the country?”

“Well, I should say a cooking pan to begin with, and a few yards of warm stuff for making my mother a skirt.”

“Well, buy the cooking pan first and sling it across your shoulder, and then as we wander about we can look in the shops and it will seem as if we were on the search for articles that we had been told to purchase; it would be better than sauntering about without any apparent object. But first let us walk briskly towards the side of the town facing the citadel. The Strada Vecchia is the one that I want to examine first.”

The knowledge that he had gained from the plan of the city enabled Hector to find the street without their having to ask any questions.

“Now, buy your cooking pan at the next smith’s shop you come to, and then we can go slowly along making our observations.”

They soon found that the street they had entered was, for the most part, deserted by its inhabitants. The shops were all closed, the road was strewn with fallen chimneys and balconies, and here and there were yawning holes showing how severely the street had suffered when the artillery duel was going on between the guns on the walls and those of the citadel. A short distance down the street a chain was stretched across it, and here a musketeer was pacing up and down on guard. Two others could be seen at the farther end of the street, where there was a gateway in the wall, now closed up with sandbags piled thickly against it.

“We will see if the other streets are similarly guarded.”

This was found to be so, sentries being placed in every street running down to the wall in this quarter.

“So far so good, Paolo. I do not think that matters could have been better for us. The next thing is to buy a tool with which we can wrench open a door or the shutter of a window; but a door will be best, because we could not work at a shutter without running the risk of being seen by a sentinel, while in a doorway we should be screened from observation. These houses in the Strada Vecchia are old, and the doors ought not to give us much trouble.”

“Some of these old locks are very strong, master. I should think that it would be easier to cut out one of the panels than to force the door open.”

“Possibly it would, but it is not an easy thing to get the saw to work. We should have to bore a hole large enough for the saw to go through before we could use it. However, we will buy both a saw and a crowbar; as they are both things that are useful to woodcutters, your buying them will not appear suspicious, nor will the purchase of an auger, but we had better get them at different shops.”

Leaving that part of the town they re-entered the streets where business was being carried on as usual.

“We won’t buy the things until late in the afternoon, Paolo. There would be no advantage in dragging them about all day.”

They sauntered about the streets for some hours, then Paolo went into a small baker’s and bought two loaves of coarse bread. At another shop he purchased some cheese, and with these they sat down on a stone bench in the principal square and leisurely ate their food and looked on at the crowd, which consisted principally of soldiers, Spanish veterans, stiff in carriage and haughty in manner, together with others, horse and foot, belonging to the contingent of the Duke of Milan, an ally of the Spanish. Among these were townspeople, the younger ones chatting with each other or with ladies of their acquaintance; the middle aged and older men talking gravely together as they walked up and down.

Among these there was an air of gloom and depression. The state of panic in which the troops of Prince Thomas, who had marched out confident that they were about to annihilate the French, had returned, and the knowledge that the Marquis of Leganez had also failed, had created a feeling of the deepest disquiet among that portion of the population who had taken a leading part in throwing off the authority of the duchess and in acknowledging that of Prince Thomas. They had regarded her cause as lost, but the vigorous steps that France was taking to assist her had caused uneasiness; and if,

while as yet a comparatively small force had arrived, these had shown so bold a front, had captured Chieri in the face of a powerful army, had revictualled Casale, had defeated Prince Thomas and forced their way past the array of Leganez, it might well be that in the spring, when reinforcements reached them, they might even defeat the Spaniards and lay siege to Turin itself. The boys remained where they were until it began to grow dusk, when, after buying at three shops a saw, a crowbar, and an auger, they went and sat down on a doorway in a quiet street until eight o'clock. Then they took their way to the Strada Vecchia. It was entirely deserted. Lights showed in one or two of the windows, but, except that they could hear the tread of the nearest sentry, all was silent. Taking off their wooden shoes they moved cautiously along, keeping close to the houses. The fourth they came to had an unusually deep doorway, and they decided at once that this would suit their purpose. First they tried with the crowbar, but the lock held firmly.

"We will try another way, Paolo. If the door yields, it will go with a crash, and the sentry might come down to see what had caused the noise. We had better take out this lower panel; we shall want four holes bored touching each other to make one large enough for the saw to enter."

The wood was of oak, and it took Paolo fully five minutes to make the holes.

"Now give me the auger," Hector said when it was found that the hole was large enough for the saw to pass through.

"I will begin at the bottom of the panel while you saw away at the top."

Paolo had done his share by the time the holes along the bottom were ready for the saw.

"Now you take the auger again," Hector said. "We have not done half our work yet. The holes must be made on each side. There is no turning the saw."

It took them an hour and a half of hard work before the last cut was completed and the panel fell forward.

"You go in first, Paolo. I will follow you, and will wedge the panel into its place again with some of the chips that the auger has cut out. No one has passed since we began, and if anyone did come along before morning he would not be likely to notice that the panel was gone. Still it is as well to avoid all risk."

As soon as the panel was replaced they mounted the stairs. Before beginning they had seen that there were no lights in any of the windows, and feeling sure that the house was deserted they groped their way upstairs without hesitation until they reached the attics in the sloping roof. They entered one of these facing the street, opened the casement, in which oiled paper took the place of glass, and stepped down on to the parapet. Their course was now easy. The divisions between the houses were marked by walls some six feet high extending from the edge of the parapet over the roof. They were able to climb these, however, without having to use their cord, one helping the other up and then being assisted by him. They had left the cooking pan and their tools, with the exception of the crowbar, behind them, and had fastened their wooden shoes round their necks. The sun during the day had melted the snow that had fallen in the morning, but light flakes were again beginning to come down fast.

"I don't care how hard it snows as long as it keeps on," Hector said in a low voice in answer to an exclamation from Paolo when the first flake fell upon his face. "The harder the better, for in that case no sentry could see us half a dozen paces away. There is another advantage. The wind is from the north, and we have only to keep the driving snow on our right cheeks to make our way straight to the fortress, whereas with an overcast sky on such a dark night as this we should very soon lose all idea of the direction that we were going in."

Being obliged to use great caution to avoid noise while getting over the walls, it took them half an hour to reach the end of the street. They had, while waiting before commencing their operations, twisted one of their sashes, and then wound it round the hook so thickly that this would fall almost noiselessly upon the ground. The snow prevented them from seeing six feet below them, but they felt

sure that there must be a narrow lane between the house and the wall. They had during the day bought a length, equal to that of their rope, of strong string.

"I have got it as you ordered it, master," Paolo said as they came out of the shop, "but it would never bear our weight."

"I think it might do in case of necessity," Hector said. "In fact, I am sure it would. It does not require a great thickness of new cord to hold a man's weight; but I don't want it for that."

Paolo walked silently along for some time, and then said: "If it is not wanted to carry our weight, master, I cannot think what it is wanted for."

"It is wanted to get the hook down with. You see when we get down into the street there would be little chance of getting the hook off its hold. We shall most likely want it again, and certainly we shall want the rope. I have been puzzling over it, and I think I have found a way at last. My idea is to fasten this thin rope to the point of the hook, then, on pulling upon it the point will rise until it gets level with the top of the wall on which it is fixed, and we can then shake it down without difficulty. I don't know whether it will act, but I think that it ought to do so; an upward pull at the point must, I should think, lift it as far as the edge."

"I should think that it must," Paolo agreed. "I should never have thought of that."

"We will try it on this last division wall. I have no doubt about it myself, because even if it did not pull it quite to the top the thing would be so canted over that I think it would fall from its own weight."

They now attached the string to the point, fixed the hook to the top of the wall, and then pulled upon the string. The hook at once fell to their feet.

"That is capital," Hector said. "Now we can go to work. We need carry this crowbar no farther. In the first place we will cross this roof and other roofs as far as we can go; the sentry at the corner is probably standing up for shelter in a doorway, and we may as well get as far as we can from him, and at the same time not go far enough to get near the one at the next corner."

After one or two attempts the hook became fixed on the ridge of the roof, and they at once climbed up, unfastened the hook, and slid down on the now snow covered tiles. Two more roofs were crossed in the same way, and then they prepared to descend. They had, when they put on their disguises, tied knots in the rope at a distance of a foot apart. They now adjusted the hook on the parapet.

"Shall I go first, master, or will you?"

"I will go first, though in fact it matters little which of us does it; but first I must warm my fingers. I don't think that I could trust to them at present."

He gathered a handful of snow, made it into a ball, and held it in his hands until the cold pained him, then he dropped the snow and thrust his hands up the sleeves of his doublet. Paolo looked on in astonishment, but having great faith in his master imitated his example.

"That is a curious way of warming the hands," he said.

"I daresay you have made snowballs in your time, Paolo, and if you have you will remember that, although it made your hands bitterly cold at first, after you had done they soon became almost as hot as fire."

"I do remember that, master, but I should never have thought of it as a way of warming our hands."

For a minute or two there was a sharp pain as the blood began to rush into the fingers, and when this passed off their hands were in a glow. Hector took the rope, lowered himself over the parapet, and then began to descend. When halfway down the darkness became more intense than before, and he knew that he was now below the level of the outer wall. When he reached the ground he shook the rope as a signal, and then, stretching his arms before him, crossed the lane. It was but a step, for the house stood but five feet back from the wall. He waited until Paolo joined him, then he drew on the thin rope and, to his satisfaction, he felt it yield.

“Stand aside,” he said, “it is heavy enough to give one a nasty thump.”

Paolo withdrew a few paces, then Hector gave another pull. The rope gave way at once. He flattened himself against the house, and the hook fell with a dull thud a foot or two away.

“Coil up the rope, Paolo, and then feel along the wall to the right; don’t go too far. I will go to the left, there may be some steps up to the rampart.”

This proved to be the case, and together they made their way up quietly, but even had they had their shoes on, the snow was already sufficiently deep to deaden their footsteps. On reaching the top they stood silent for a minute or two. Presently they heard the sound of heavy stamping of feet. They turned at once to descend, if necessary, the steps they had mounted, then Hector put his hand upon the other’s shoulder and whispered, “It is the sentry trying to warm his feet; no doubt he is standing up somewhere to shelter himself from the snow; let us go on at once.”

They crossed the rampart, fastened the hook on the top of the wall, and descended, and were again successful in bringing the rope down after them.

“Go carefully, Paolo; no doubt there is a moat somewhere here.” There was, however, no necessity for caution, for the white surface of the snow was soon broken by a black line.

“It will be awfully cold,” Paolo said, with teeth that chattered at the prospect.

“Of course you can swim, Paolo?”

“Not very well, master.”

“Then I will go first. You fasten the rope under your arms, and I will haul you across. Be sure you do not make a noise in getting into the water. But first of all take off your doublet, I will carry it and mine across on my head. It cannot be many yards across. The wind will soon dry the rest of our things, and once our work is done we can warm ourselves by running. I would say strip altogether, but we may have to do another swim; for, as we agreed, there is no chance of our being able to return by the way we came.”

Fastening the two doublets on his head, Hector lowered himself into the water, which was three feet below the level on which they stood. He had fastened the rope across his shoulder. As he expected, he found the water out of his depth, and at once struck out to the opposite side. It was about forty feet across. He found, on reaching the other side, that the wall was there nearly five feet above the water. He undid the rope and threw up the hook. At the second attempt it caught, and he climbed the side, and then in a low voice told Paolo to start. Presently he heard a slight splash, followed by a gasp. He hauled away rapidly on the rope, and in a couple of minutes Paolo stood beside him, shivering and gasping.

“Put your doublet on. Now let us go forward as fast as we can.” They climbed the steep slope to the top of the glacis, and then ran down until they were brought to a standstill by another moat.

“This is the one marked in the plan as dividing the fortifications of the town from those of the citadel. Now we have another swim before us. It is wider than the last, but is really no distance. Give me your doublet again.”

“I don’t mind this so much,” Paolo said. “I cannot be colder than I am.”

“Don’t try to swim, Paolo; lie on your back, with your mouth just out of water. I will have you over in no time.”

It was fully fifty yards across; but, accustomed to bathe in almost icy cold water, the swim was nothing to Hector, who was soon across, and who then towed Paolo over as before. They mounted another glacis, and presently reached the edge of a third moat.

“We need go no farther. I know that this moat is but some fifteen yards from the foot of the fortifications. Now, get the arrows out. Cut off a foot or two of the thin cord, and unravel it. I must warm my fingers again first, I cannot use them at all.”

“Mine are pretty cold, too.” And both lads warmed them as before. Paolo then set to work to string the bow, which required all his strength to accomplish. While he was doing so, Hector drew from his pouch the six little pellets, and taking the arrows, straightened out each pellet, wrapped it

round an arrow, and secured it firmly with a small strand from the string. When he had done this, he took the bow from Paolo, fitted an arrow to the string, drew it with his full strength, and then, pointing the arrow high, loosed it. The six arrows were sent off. Just as the last was discharged there was a shout of "Who is there? Speak, or I fire!" It was a sentry on the wall, who had caught the sound of the twang of the bow.

"I am a friend, a messenger from the French general," Hector replied. "I have just shot six arrows into the fortress; a message is attached to each for the governor. Report to the officer, and have a search made for them in the morning.

"That is a piece of good luck," he went on as they turned away. "I thought of shouting, but we might have got a shot in reply, and I made sure that one or other of the arrows would be picked up. Still, this makes certain of it."

"I think I would rather stop out here until morning," Paolo said, "then they will take me in. I am afraid I shall never get across the river."

"Nonsense! The water is low, and we are not likely to have to swim farther than we did in crossing the last moat. Getting through the part of the town between us and the river is a more serious matter. However, it is not very far across, and they are not likely to be very vigilant."

They turned to the right, and kept along at the edge of the moat, until Hector considered that they had made a fourth of the circuit of the walls, and were now facing the river. They had decided before that this would be the easiest side on which to leave the town. The sentinels would not expect that anyone attempting to enter or leave the citadel would try to do so here; as, in addition to passing the wall facing the fortress and that bordering the river, they would be obliged to swim the river itself. The snow was falling as quickly as ever, and the wind blowing fiercely.

"There is no fear of their seeing us, unless we happen to run into the very arms of the sentry," Hector said encouragingly; "we shall only have the moat to swim; and as, according to the plan, it is nothing like so wide as that we passed before, we shall have no trouble with it."

"Ah! here it is," Paolo groaned.

"Nonsense!" Hector said. "One cold bath more or less makes no difference now. There, give me your coat again, and I will take it over."

The moat was indeed but some twelve yards across, and in two or three minutes Paolo stood shivering on the other side.

"The edge is not far from the wall, not much more than the breadth of the moat. Give me the cord."

A few steps and they reached the wall. After two attempts the hook caught, and Hector climbed up. He was looking back to watch Paolo when he was suddenly seized from behind, and a deep voice in Italian said, "If you move I will kill you. Who are you?"

With a sudden effort Hector twisted himself round and seized the disengaged wrist of his opponent, which he doubted not held a dagger. The man loosened his hold of his doublet and tried to grasp his neck, but Hector in a moment leapt forward and threw his arm round the man's waist. They wrestled backwards and forwards, but the soldier was a powerful man, and Hector found that he could not long retain a grasp of his wrist. Suddenly he felt his antagonist collapse; the dagger dropped from his hand, the other arm relaxed its hold, and he fell a lifeless mass.

"Thank you, Paolo. You were but just in time. The fellow was too strong for me. Now let us slip down the inside of the wall as quickly as possible."

A minute later they both stood at the foot of the wall, the hook was shaken off, and they proceeded along the wall until they came to a street.

"It is not more than two or three hundred yards to the outer wall," Hector whispered.

Whether there were sentinels or not in the street they knew not. If so, they had withdrawn themselves into deep doorways to avoid the blinding snow, and the wind drowned the slight sound made by their feet on the soft snow.

In a short time they reached the outer wall, crept along it until they found the steps leading up, crossed it in safety, fixed their hook, and rapidly descended. A run of fifty yards brought them to the edge of the river bank.

“We will try to find a boat,” Hector said. “There are sure to be some along here.”

They walked across the dry bed of the river till they reached the water’s edge, and then followed this. In a few minutes, to their delight, they came upon a boat. The bow was hauled a few feet out of water, and a rope, doubtless attached to a heavy stone anchor, stretched from its bows. This they cut, put their shoulders to the gunwale, and soon had her afloat. Then they scrambled in, put the oars out cautiously, and began to row. Both had had some practice at the exercise, and it was not long before the boat grounded on the opposite shore.

“Pull it up a bit,” Hector said. “No doubt it belongs to some poor fisherman to whom its loss would be serious. Now we must keep along the bank for some distance, until quite sure that we are well beyond any patrols the enemy may have on the road. Let us get into a run, Paolo, and see if we can’t get our blood in motion again, for I own that I feel half frozen.”

They set off at a brisk trot, which they kept up for half an hour, and then they struck off from the river and soon found the road. Following this, after an hour’s walking they came upon a little shed by the roadside, and in one corner found a pile of old sacks.

“We are in luck again!” Hector exclaimed joyfully. “Tired as I am, I don’t think that I could have slept in these wet clothes, if one can call them wet—at present they are frozen stiff. These sacks are the very thing. We can strip now and wring out our clothes thoroughly. There are enough sacks here to lay under us and cover us too. After wringing out the shirts we will put them in under the sacks next to us. The heat of our bodies will dry them to some extent, and they will be warm to put on in the morning. The other things we can pile over us. There is no chance of their getting dry; but I am so pleased with our success that I am not disposed to grumble at trifles.”

CHAPTER V: THE RELIEF OF THE CITADEL

As soon as the first gleam of daylight showed itself Hector and his companion were on their feet again.

The operation of dressing was by no means a comfortable one, for the frost had set in in earnest during the night, and their clothes, with the exception of the shirts, were as stiff as boards. The snow had ceased and the sky was clear.

"It is going to be a fine day, master," Paolo said as they left the hut.

"That is better than battling with a snowstorm such as that of yesterday evening. Come on, Paolo, let us trot for a bit. The snow is four inches deep, and we shall soon get warm running through it."

In a quarter of an hour they broke into a walk again, panting from their exertions.

"I am as warm as a toast now, Paolo. There is a village half a mile ahead. I expect that lies on the road. The sun will be up before we get there, and no doubt we shall be able to get some hot spiced wine and some bread at a wineshop."

This turned out to be the case. They had settled what story to tell; and when the landlord asked what brought them there so early, Paolo said that they had been on the road a couple of hours, as they were going to see an aunt who was ill at Chivasso, and their father wanted them back again that night. The explanation satisfied the host and he asked no further questions, and in ten minutes they were on their way again, greatly warmed and comforted by their meal, and after walking for another hour and a half they arrived at the bridge of Chivasso. There was a strong guard at the bridge head, for at any moment the garrison of Turin, aided by a force from Leganez's army, might endeavour to carry the town by a sudden assault. The lads passed the bridge unquestioned, entered the gate of the town, and made their way to the commandant's house.

"What do you want?" the sentry at the door asked as they came up.

The regiment was French, and Hector answered at once:

"We want to see the governor, we have important news for him."

The soldier was greatly surprised, for he had not expected his question to be understood by these peasant boys.

"Sergeant," he called out, "here are two peasant boys who speak French. They want to see the governor, and say that they have news of importance to give him."

A sergeant came out.

"Sergeant," Hector went on quietly, "you will please tell the governor that the two persons he sent out under an escort the evening before last, wish to see him."

By the tone of assurance in which the lad spoke, rather than by his words, the sergeant saw that there was something more than appeared on the surface, and at once took up the message. He returned almost immediately. "Please to follow me," he said, and led the way up to the governor's room.

"Welcome back again, Monsieur Campbell! You have returned sooner than I expected. You found, of course, that the difficulties were insuperable?"

"On the contrary, sir, we have been successful, and have communicated with the garrison of the citadel."

"You have!" the governor exclaimed in astonishment. "How on earth did you manage it? I heard that the watch was so strict that it was absolutely impossible for a message to be sent through."

"It was not very difficult after all, and we were greatly favoured by the snowstorm." He then gave an account of how they had managed it.

"Pardieu!" he exclaimed, "that was admirably done; but I am keeping you talking while you are sitting in your wet clothes."

"I think they are quite dry now, sir; and we have walked so fast that we are both thoroughly warm. Still, I own that I shall not be sorry to change them for my own."

The governor rose and opened the door. "Your clothes are all hanging up in that closet. I will have some hot water sent up at once. I shall be breakfasting in half an hour, so you will have time to change comfortably."

Hector was even more glad of a thorough wash than of a change of clothes, and went down to join the governor at breakfast, feeling greatly refreshed.

"Shall I wait on you, master?"

"No, it is not necessary, Paolo; you had better go into the kitchen at once. I have no doubt the governor has ordered them to attend to your wants as he did before."

Four other officers had just arrived on the invitation of the governor to breakfast; one of these was the captain who had commanded the escort.

"Gentlemen," the commandant said, "let me introduce to you Monsieur Campbell, a lieutenant on the staff of Viscount Turenne. He has just returned after having successfully carried out a most dangerous and difficult mission, namely, that of communicating with the garrison of Turin."

The officers gave an exclamation of surprise, while Captain Simon stepped forward and shook hands warmly with Hector.

"You did not tell me exactly what you were going to do," he said. "I thought that it was to see some of the duchess's adherents in Turin, but I never dreamt that you were going to attempt to communicate with the citadel. Had I known that, I certainly should not have expected to see you again, for from what we have heard it is next to impossible to get through the enemy's lines."

"We will not trouble Monsieur Campbell until he has finished his breakfast," the commandant said. "He has already told me briefly how he managed, but I shall be as glad as you will to have the details."

Accordingly, after breakfast Hector related at much greater length the story that he had told the governor of the manner in which the mission had been carried out.

"Ma foi!" the colonel said, "I would rather have faced a battery than swum those moats in such weather. Well, gentlemen, I think that you will agree with me that Monsieur de Turenne is fortunate in having so brave and enterprising an officer on his staff."

The officers cordially assented.

"I wonder that you did not enter the citadel and stay there till the convoy arrived."

"In the first place, colonel, I had received no orders to do so, and the general might require me for other service. And in the second place, had I not returned he would not have known whether his message had reached the garrison, and so might have hurried on his preparations more hastily than he otherwise would have done, and might, in his fear that the garrison would surrender, have made the attempt before he had collected sufficient food to last them until he was in a position to raise the siege."

"Your reasons are good ones; but certainly, with shelter and warmth close at hand—for the sentry would speedily have passed the word along, and as soon as it was ascertained that you were indeed a French officer, and alone, the gates would have been opened for you—it must have required no small effort to turn away and to face the danger of passing the sentries and scaling the walls, of possibly having to swim the Po, and of certainly having no chance of getting a change of clothes until you arrived here, for you could not have calculated upon finding the shed, much less those sacks, with the snow falling heavily."

"That was a piece of good fortune, indeed. If we had not found it, we should have gone on walking until we got here. Still, we had had little sleep the night before, and were heartily glad that we had no farther to go. And now, sir, with your permission we will start for Susa at once."

"Your escort returned yesterday, but I will send a troop of cavalry with you."

“Thank you, sir, but I do not think that there is any necessity for it. We are very well mounted, and should we see any party of the enemy’s cavalry I think that we ought to be able to outdistance them. I shall be glad, colonel, if you and your officers will say nothing about the manner in which I communicated with the garrison, as doubtless the enemy have spies here; and if the story comes out and reaches the ears of the authorities at Turin, I should have no chance whatever of making my way in, in the same manner, should the general entrust me with another mission to communicate with the citadel.”

A quarter of an hour later Hector and Paolo mounted and rode out of the town. They kept a vigilant lookout, and traveled by byroads, but they saw none of the enemy’s parties, and reached Susa late that afternoon. On sending in his name to Turenne, Hector was at once shown into his room.

“I did not expect you back for another three or four days, Campbell,” the general said, “and I am heartily glad to see you again safe and sound. I blamed myself for letting you go. Of course, as I expected, you found the task an altogether impossible one. Had it been otherwise you would not have been back so soon.”

“On the contrary, general, for I should have tried many plans before I gave it up. As it is, I have only to report that I have carried out your instructions, and that your despatches are in the hands of the garrison of the citadel.”

“You do not say so!” Turenne said, rising from the table at which he had been sitting writing when Hector entered, and shaking him warmly by the hand. “I congratulate both you and myself on your having performed a mission that seemed well nigh hopeless. But by what miracle did you succeed in passing through the enemy’s lines? All who have tried it before have either died in the attempt or have returned to tell me that it was an absolutely impossible one.”

“It would have been very difficult, general, had not the weather favoured us. The snowstorm drove the sentries into shelter, and even had they remained at their posts they could not have seen us five yards away.”

“No, I can understand that once beyond the wall you might in such a storm make your way unnoticed up to the fortress; but I understood that not only were there guards on the walls and down near the great moat, but that there were also sentries in all the streets leading to the walls, and that none were allowed to pass along those leading to the walls facing the citadel. Tell me how you managed it.”

“The story is a long one, sir.”

“Never mind how long it is; give me all details. I am not particularly busy at present, and I would fain know exactly how this feat has been accomplished.”

Hector told his story at length. Beyond asking a question now and then, Turenne remained silent until he had brought it to a conclusion.

“I have never heard a story that interested me more,” he said, “and I do not know which to admire more, your ingenuity in planning this affair or the hardihood and courage with which you carried it out. Even had there been no enemy to get through, the adventure of letting yourself down by a rope from the housetop and then from the battlements, swimming three moats, crossing the river in such terrible weather, and finally making your way to Chivasso in your frozen clothes, is no slight feat of endurance. The service that you have rendered is a great one, the manner in which you have carried it out is worthy of the highest praise, and I shall at once make out your commission as captain. You are still a year behind me,” he added with a smile, “but if you go on in this way, you bid fair to obtain a regiment as soon as I did. You have nearly four years to do it in. Tomorrow you will dictate your story in full to my secretary. I shall be sending a messenger with despatches on the following day. I shall mention that I have promoted you to the rank of captain, and that the story of the action that you have performed, which I shall inclose, will fully explain my reason for so speedily advancing you. No, I require no thanks; you have to thank yourself only. I may consider that you have not only done me but the state a service. Your servant deserves a reward also. Here are twenty pistoles; tell him not to throw them away, but to lay them by where some day they will be useful to him.”

Paolo was astonished indeed when Hector handed him the general's present. He could at first hardly believe that it was meant for him.

"Why, master," he said, "it would buy me a farm up in the hills!"

"Not a very large one, Paolo, but I daresay that you will add to it; still, this is a good beginning, and some more opportunities may come in your way."

"What shall I do with them, master?"

"That I cannot say. Certainly you cannot carry them about with you. Do you know anyone to whom you could entrust them?"

Paolo shook his head. "There is never any knowing who is an honest man and who is not," he said. "I will bury them, master."

"But somebody might find them."

"No fear of that, sir. I will go a bit up the valley and bury them under a big rock well above the river, so that it will not be reached in the highest floods. They might lie there a hundred years without anyone finding them, even if every soul in Susa knew that they were hidden somewhere and went out to search for them."

"Very well; but be sure you take notice of the exact position of the stone, or you may not be able to find it again yourself. One big stone is a good deal like another. Choose a stone with a tree growing near it, and make a cross with your knife on the bark. That will serve as a guide to you, and you would recognize the stone by it even if you could not find it in any other way."

"Thank you, master. I will go out tomorrow morning and choose my stone, and then when it begins to get dark I will go out and bury my money there. It would not do to hide it in the daytime, for even were there no one on the road someone upon the hills might catch sight of me and come down afterwards to see what I was disposing of."

"Well, I think that that is the best thing that you can do, Paolo. There is certainly a danger in leaving it in anyone's hands, for when you return to claim it, perhaps some years hence, you might find that he was dead, or the place might be captured and burned down. Yes, I think that hiding it is the safest way. You will be pleased to hear that the general has given me a commission as captain."

"That is good news, indeed," the boy said. "I was just going to ask, master, what he had done for you, because, though I went with you, it was you who planned the business, and I only did as you told me."

"You had something to do with the planning, too, Paolo. However, I think that we may both feel well content with the rewards that we have obtained for two days' work."

As Hector went out he met de Lisle and Chavigny.

"Well met!" the former exclaimed. "We have just left the general, and he has told us what you have done, and that he has made you a captain in consequence. We were just coming to look for you to carry you off to supper in honour of your promotion."

"You deserve it, if anyone ever did, there is no doubt of that," Chavigny said heartily. "We are quite proud of our comrade."

"It seems absurd that I should be a captain."

"Not absurd at all," Chavigny said. "Turenne was a captain when he was a year younger than you are, and there is many a noble who has been made a colonel before he ever drew sword in battle."

Hector was much pleased at the evidently genuine congratulations of his companions. He had indeed rather feared that they would take his promotion ill; being nearly five years his senior, and having served in two previous campaigns, they might well feel hurt at his being promoted while they still remained only lieutenants. The young nobles indeed felt no shade of jealousy. It was but of late that there had been a regular army, for the nobles still brought their tenants and retainers to the field and supported them at their own expense.

To de Lisle and Chavigny these grades of military rank were of no account whatever. The rank of colonel would add in no way to their position as members of noble families. They fought

for honour, and against the enemies of France. They were always addressed by their family name, and would both have resented being called lieutenant. They were proud of being Turenne's aides-de-camp, but had no thought of remaining in the army after the war was over, as they would then resume their place at court. They had both taken a strong liking to their young comrade, whose manner of thought differed so widely from their own. They appreciated the merits of the action of which their general had spoken in such warm terms, and the fact that in point of military rank he was now above them concerned them in no way. It was a merry supper at the best hotel in Susa.

"You see now, de Lisle," Chavigny said, "the advantage of taking a morning dip in snow water. Neither you nor I would have swum across those moats, and remained all night long in our wet clothes, for a thousand crowns."

"No, no, nor for five thousand," the other laughed. "Pass me the wine; it makes me shiver to think of it. I fancy we may as well admit at once that if the mission had been entrusted to us, we should have made a mess of it. We should have been shot by the guards in the first street we entered. As to climbing along the roofs of houses till we had passed the first line of sentinels, the idea would never have entered our heads. Of course we might have disguised ourselves, and might have got into the town by harnessing ourselves to a load of faggots, but once there we should have had no more chance of getting into the fortress than if we had at once proclaimed ourselves French officers, and had requested a pass into the citadel."

For the next ten days every effort was made to obtain carts and pack horses from the villages round Susa, and a number of wagons filled with provisions were brought from Carignano, where the principal supplies for the army had been collected. On the fourteenth day all was ready, and late in the afternoon the convoy, with fifteen hundred men from Susa, and four pieces of artillery, marched out. At the same hour the force at Carignano, six thousand strong, leaving only a small body to garrison the city, started for Turin along the farther bank of the Po, and just as day broke a heavy cannonade was opened by them against one of the city gates.

Astonished and alarmed, the troops in the city flew to arms, and hurried to repulse the attack. A quarter of an hour later the dim light of the morning showed the astonished sentries at the end of the town surrounding the citadel a considerable force advancing to the attack of the gate there, opposite which, at a distance of two hundred yards, four cannon were placed, and scarcely had they made out the enemy when these opened fire. A few rounds and the gate was in splinters, and the infantry rushed forward. The sentries on the walls took to flight, and the assailants pushed forward to the inner gate. Access was obtained from that side to the citadel, and then, under the direction of their officers, the assailants occupied all the side streets. At once the procession of carts was allowed to pass along. Some of the garrison ran down and lowered the drawbridge across the moat, and amid exultant shouts a store sufficient for many months was conveyed into the citadel. The carts as quickly as they were unloaded returned through the gates and passed out into the country beyond. By this time a fierce fight had begun. As soon as the firing was heard opposite the citadel, Prince Thomas and his military advisers guessed at once that the attack had been but a feint, made with the object of effecting the relief of the citadel, and calling several regiments to follow them they hastened in that direction. On their way they met the fugitives, and hurried on with all speed. As they approached the street through which the wagons were passing out, they were checked by a heavy fire. The four guns had been placed in pairs at the end of the streets, and the houses near them filled with troops who kept up a murderous fire from the windows, on the head of the columns, and held them completely in check until the last wagon had been taken out. Then the cannon were removed, and when these too were fairly outside the city, a bugle call summoned the defenders of the houses, and the infuriated Italians and Spaniards, when they rushed down into the street between the gates, found that the last of their foes had escaped them. The artillerymen ran up to the walls, only to find that the guns had been spiked, and they were powerless to inflict any serious damage upon the retiring force.

Prince Thomas ordered a sally, but at this moment a regiment of cavalry from Chivasso was seen dashing across the plain, and being without artillery or cavalry the order was countermanded. Indeed, the prolonged roll of artillery at the other end of the city seemed to show that the French were converting their feigned attack into a real one. Turenne had himself accompanied the column from Carignano, for he knew that the sound of firing might bring up Leganez from Asti, and that he might find his retreat to Carignano intercepted. The moment, however, that the sound of four guns at equal intervals showed that the other column had achieved its object, he at once fell back, his fire ceasing a few minutes before Prince Thomas and his horse arrived at the walls. He had not been accompanied by Hector, who was with the force from Susa.

"You carried my message to the garrison," he said, "and it is but right that you should have the honour of leading the party to its relief."

On arriving near the city Hector had dismounted, and, giving his horse in charge of Paolo, had placed himself at the head of the company that was first to enter the town, its captain being transferred to another company.

"Now, men," he said, as they stood waiting for the dawn to break, "the moment we enter the gates half the company will mount the wall to the right, the other half to the left, and each will push along to the next angle of the wall. Lieutenants, one of you will go with each wing of the company, and you will oppose to the last any force that may march along the rampart to attack you. I want one soldier to keep by me."

As day began to break, each man grasped his firelock and awaited the signal with impatience. A cheer broke from them as the four cannon roared out at the same moment, and at so short a distance that every shot told on the gate. Another salvo and both halves of the gate were splintered.

"Aim at the centre where the lock is," an officer shouted.

"Get ready, men," Hector said. "Another round and the gate will fall."

As the cannon rung out there was a shout of triumph. One of the gates fell to the ground and Hector dashed forward, followed closely by his company. Not a single shot was fired from the walls, and the men burst through the gates cheering. The leading wing of the company turned to the right, and, led by Hector, ran up the steps close to the gateway on to the rampart.

"Take them on to that bastion at the angle of the wall, lieutenant. I do not think that you are likely to be attacked at present. The enemy must all have been drawn off to the other end of the city. Now, my man, open that bag."

In it were a couple of dozen large nails and a hammer. "Drive one of those right down the vent of this gun. That is right. One more blow. That will do. They won't get that nail out soon."

He went along the wall spiking each gun until they reached the half company drawn up in the bastion. "No enemy in sight, lieutenant?"

"None, sir, at least not on the wall. We heard them running away in the streets below."

"Remember, lieutenant, whatever force may come along you must withstand them. It will not be for long. You will be at once supported if we hear firing."

Then he retraced his steps along the ramparts, passed over the gateway, and saw to the spiking of each gun as far as the next angle of the wall. Here he repeated his instructions to the lieutenant there.

"I do not think," he said, "that there is much chance of your being attacked. The enemy would have to make a detour right round the citadel to come here, and certainly they will return by the shortest way, as soon as they discover that the other attack is but a feint."

Then he returned to the first party.

"Get the two guns," he said, "out of their embrasures and wheel them here. It is likely enough that we may be hotly attacked presently."

They waited half an hour, by which time the wagons were beginning to pour out of the town.

“We have done our business, lieutenant; the citadel is revictualled. Ah! here come the enemy, just too late.”

A strong body of troops were seen marching rapidly towards them, and almost at the same moment a heavy fire broke out in the street. The guns had been loaded from a small magazine in the bastion, and had been trained to fire along the rampart. When within a hundred yards the enemy opened fire. Hector ordered the men to lie down and not to reply until he gave the order. They lay in two lines, the first were to fire and the second to reserve their fire until ordered. He took his post at one gun and the lieutenant at the other. A messenger had been sent along the wall to bring up the twenty-five men of the other wing. When the enemy were within fifty yards he asked quietly, “Does your gun bear well on the centre of the column?”

“Yes, captain.”

“Then fire!”

The ball cut a way through the dense column.

“Load again!”

The four men, told off to the duty, leapt to their feet. There was a halt for a moment, and then the Spaniards came on again. When they were within twenty paces Hector fired, and at the same time shouted, “First line give fire!” and twenty-five muskets flashed out, every ball taking effect on the head of the column. The Spaniards recoiled, the leading ranks being swept away and many of those behind wounded, for three balls had been rammed down the mouth of the cannon fired by Hector, and these and the musketry volley had done terrible execution. At this moment the twenty-five men sent for ran up.

“Second line give fire!” Hector shouted; and the discharge added to the confusion in the column, and many ran down some steps into the lane by the side of the wall.

“Have you loaded again, lieutenant?”

“Yes, sir, with three balls.”

“Then form up, men, and deliver your fire,” Hector said to the newcomers. “Now, lieutenant, touch it off.”

As the discharge rang out, mingled with the roar of the guns, Hector shouted, “Fix bayonets, and charge!” The wooden shafts of the bayonets were thrust down the barrels of the firelocks, and with a cheer the seventy-five men rushed upon the shattered head of the column. The charge was irresistible, and the enemy at once fled at full speed along the rampart or leapt from the wall into the lane below.

“Well done, men, well done!” Hector shouted. “Do not pursue. Reload your cannon, though I do not think there is much fear of their returning.”

A few minutes later the soldier who had carried the spikes, and who had been left on the wall, ran up to say that the last cart had passed out.

“Go and tell the other party to fall back to the gate,” Hector said; “but first give me two spikes and the hammer. They might run these cannons into the places of those disabled.” So saying, he spiked the two guns that had done such good service, and then retired to the gate, where he was joined by the remainder of the company. As the bugle rung out after the last wagon had passed, and he saw the troops issuing from the houses at the corners of the cross streets, he marched his company across the drawbridge, out into the country, and followed the guns. When he reached the spot where Paolo was holding the horses, he resigned the command of the company and mounted.

“Men,” he said, “you have played your part well, and I am proud to have commanded soldiers so steady and courageous.”

At this moment the general, who was in command of the force, and who had been the last to leave the town, rode up, the men coming along at a run.

“You had better hurry your men on,” he said to the colonel with whom Hector had acted; “the enemy will be on the ramparts in a minute, and you may be sure that they won’t let us off without trouble from their guns.”

“I beg your pardon, general,” Hector said saluting, “but the guns all along this side of the wall are useless; I have spiked them.”

“You have, sir! That was well done indeed. Who gave you the orders, and how did you come by spikes?”

“I had no orders, general; but I was appointed to command the first company that entered, and was told that we were to turn right and left along the ramparts. It struck me that as, when we had left, the enemy would be sure to turn their guns upon us, it would be as well to silence them, so I brought the nails and a hammer with me for the purpose.”

“It would be well, sir, if we had a good many officers as thoughtful as you are. You have saved us from heavy loss, for, as the country is perfectly level for a mile round, they would have swept our ranks as we marched off. Were you attacked, sir?”

“Yes, general, by a force of about four hundred men, but I turned two of the guns against them. My men fought well, and we repulsed them with a loss of fully a hundred men.”

“Bravo, sir, bravo! I shall not fail to mention the service that you have rendered in my report of the affair. Have you lost any men?”

“No, sir; they lay down until the enemy were within twenty paces of us, and their volleys and the two cannon created such a confusion among the Spaniards that when we went at them with the bayonet they fled at once, and I have not a single man killed, and only two or three slightly wounded.”

“We have only lost twenty,” the general said, “and most of those were killed while serving the guns. That was a small price indeed to pay for our magnificent success.”

CHAPTER VI: A CHANGE OF SCENE

Hector gained great credit from the report of the manner in which the force had been enabled to draw off without loss from the enemy's guns, owing to his forethought in bringing with him the means of spiking them, and also for his success in checking the advance of the enemy along the ramparts.

"You see, messieurs," Turenne said to the members of his staff, who, with the exception of Hector, were together on the day after his return to Susa, "how important it is for officers, before setting out on an expedition, to think seriously over every contingency that may happen. Now the vast proportion of officers consider that all the thinking has to be done by the general, and that they only have to obey orders. No doubt that is essential, but there may be numerous little matters in which an officer may render great service. This young captain of ours did not content himself with leading the company to which I appointed him through the gateway. Before leaving Susa he must have thought over every incident likely to occur. As the leading company he would know that it would be his business to clear the ramparts, to check any parties of the enemy coming along that way, and it would be only natural for him to determine to use the enemy's cannon to keep them at bay.

"This would probably have occurred to most officers placed as he was. But he did not stop there—he must have thought over the events that would probably follow the entry. He knew, of course, that our feint at the other end of the town would draw off the greater portion of the garrison, but would be sure also that as soon as the attack began, and it became evident that our real object was to revictual the citadel, they would come pouring back again. He would have said to himself, 'We shall be able to keep them at bay until our work is done, then we shall have to fall back. What then? The enemy will mount the ramparts, and while their main force pours out in pursuit, their guns on the walls will play havoc with us. To prevent this I must silence them before my company retires.'

"It is all very simple when we look at it after it is done, and yet probably it did not occur to a single officer of that force except to Captain Campbell. I admit that it did not occur to myself. Had it done so, I should have ordered that some of the artillerymen should carry spikes and hammers, and that upon entering the town they should immediately take steps, by rendering the guns harmless, to enable the force to draw off without heavy loss. In the same way he showed a cool and calculating brain when he carried out that most dangerous service of bearing the news that we should speedily bring aid to the citadel. It is difficult to imagine a better laid plan. He thought of everything—of his disguise, of the manner in which it would alone be possible to approach closely to the wall.

"I think that few of us would have thought of making our way up through a house a hundred yards away, working along the roofs and descending into the lane by the wall itself. I asked him how he got the rope down which it was necessary for him to use four or five times afterwards, and he showed me the plan by which he contrived to free the hook; it was most ingenious. It did not seem to me that it would have acted as he told me, and I asked him to have another one made so that I might understand how it was worked, for such a contrivance would be extremely useful in escalades, when the troops, after descending into a deep fosse, need the rope for climbing a wall or bastion. There it is, gentlemen, and as you see, by pulling this thin cord the hook is lifted from its hold, and the slightest shake will bring it down.

"The contrivance is an excellent one. The line he took was well chosen. He accomplished the most dangerous part first, and made his way out by the side where the watch was most likely to be careless, as anyone leaving or entering the town there would have to swim the river. The feat shows that he has not only abundance of courage of the very highest order, but that he has a head to plan and leaves nothing to chance. You will see, gentlemen, that if this young officer lives he is likely to gain the highest rank and position. Already I have every reason to congratulate myself upon having, almost as it were by chance, taken him under my protection."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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