Weyman Stanley John

The Red Cockade

Stanley Weyman

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Содержание

CHAPTER I. 5
CHAPTER II. 12
CHAPTER III. 19
CHAPTER IV. 25
CHAPTER V. 31
CHAPTER VI. 38
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента. 42

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CHAPTER I.
THE MARQUIS DE ST. ALAIS

When we reached the terraced walk, which my father made a little before his death, and which, running under the windows at the rear of the Château, separates the house from the new lawn, St. Alais looked round with eyes of scarcely-veiled contempt.

"What have you done with the garden?" he asked, his lip curling.

"My father removed it to the other side of the house," I answered.

"Out of sight?"

"Yes," I said; "it is beyond the rose garden."

"English fashion!" he answered with a shrug and a polite sneer. "And you prefer to see all this grass from your windows?"

"Yes," I said, "I do."

"Ah! And that plantation? It hides the village, I suppose, from the house?"

"Yes."

He laughed. "Yes," he said. "I notice that that is the way of all who prate of the people, and freedom, and fraternity. They love the people; but they love them at a distance, on the farther side of a park or a high yew hedge. Now, at St. Alais I like to have my folks under my eye, and then, if they do not behave, there is the *carcan*. By the way, what have you done with yours, Vicomte? It used to stand opposite the entrance."

"I have burned it," I said, feeling the blood mount to my temples.

"Your father did, you mean?" he answered, with a glance of surprise.

"No," I said stubbornly, hating myself for being ashamed of that before St. Alais of which I had been proud enough when alone. "I did. I burned it last winter. I think the day of such things is past."

The Marquis was not my senior by more than five years; but those five years, spent in Paris and Versailles, gave him a wondrous advantage, and I felt his look of contemptuous surprise as I should have felt a blow. However, he did not say anything at the moment, but after a short pause changed the subject and began to speak of my father; recalling him and things in connection with him in a tone of respect and affection that in a moment disarmed my resentment.

"The first time that I shot a bird on the wing I was in his company!" he said, with the wonderful charm of manner that had been St. Alais' even in boyhood.

"Twelve years ago," I said.

"Even so, Monsieur," he replied with a laughing bow. "In those days there was a small boy with bare legs, who ran after me, and called me Victor, and thought me the greatest of men. I little dreamed that he would ever live to expound the rights of man to me. And, *Dieu!* Vicomte, I must keep Louis from you, or you will make him as great a reformer as yourself. However," he continued, passing from that subject with a smile and an easy gesture, "I did not come here to talk of him, but of one, M. le Vicomte, in whom you should feel even greater interest."

I felt the blood mount to my temples again, but for a different reason. "Mademoiselle has come home?" I said.

"Yesterday," he answered. "She will go with my mother to Cahors to-morrow, and take her first peep at the world. I do not doubt that among the many new things she will see, none will interest her more than the Vicomte de Saux."

"Mademoiselle is well?" I said clumsily.

"Perfectly," he answered with grave politeness, "as you will see for yourself to-morrow evening, if we do not meet on the road. I daresay that you will like a week or so to commend yourself to her, M. le Vicomte? And after that, whenever Madame la Marquise and you can settle the date, and so forth, the match had better come off-while I am here."

I bowed. I had been expecting to hear this for a week past; but from Louis, who was on brotherly terms with me, not from Victor. The latter had indeed been my boyish idol; but that was years ago, before Court life and a long stay at Versailles and St. Cloud had changed him into the splendid-looking man I saw before me, the raillery of whose eye I found it as difficult to meet as I found it impossible to match the aplomb of his manner. Still, I strove to make such acknowledgments as became me; and to adopt that nice mixture of self-respect, politeness, and devotion which I knew that the occasion, formally treated, required. But my tongue stumbled, and in a moment he relieved me.

"Well, you must tell that to Denise," he said pleasantly; "doubtless you will find her a patient listener. At first, of course," he continued, pulling on his gauntlets and smiling faintly, "she will be a little shy. I have no doubt that the good sisters have brought her up to regard a man in much the same light as a wolf; and a suitor as something worse. But, *eh bien, mon ami!* women are women after all, and in a week or two you will commend yourself. We may hope, then, to see you to-morrow evening-if not before?"

"Most certainly, M. le Marquis."

"Why not Victor?" he answered, laying his hand on my arm with a touch of the old *bonhomie*. "We shall soon be brothers, and then, doubtless, shall hate one another. In the meantime, give me your company to the gates. There was one other thing I wanted to name to you. Let me see-what was it?"

But either he could not immediately remember, or he found a difficulty in introducing the subject, for we were nearly half-way down the avenue of walnut trees that leads to the village when he spoke again. Then he plunged into the matter abruptly.

"You have heard of this protest?" he said.

"Yes," I answered reluctantly and with a foresight of trouble.

"You will sign it, of course?"

He had hesitated before he asked the question; I hesitated before I answered it. The protest to which he referred-how formal the phrase now sounds, though we know that under it lay the beginning of trouble and a new world-was one which it was proposed to move in the coming meeting of the *noblesse* at Cahors; its aim, to condemn the conduct of our representatives at Versailles, in consenting to sit with the Third Estate.

Now, for myself, whatever had been my original views on this question-and, as a fact, I should have preferred to see reform following the English model, the nobles' house remaining separate-I regarded the step, now it was taken, and legalised by the King, as irrevocable; and protest as useless. More, I could not help knowing that those who were moving the protest desired also to refuse all reform, to cling to all privileges, to balk all hopes of better government; hopes, which had been rising higher, day by day, since the elections, and which it might not now be so safe or so easy to balk. Without swallowing convictions, therefore, which were pretty well known, I could not see my way to supporting it. And I hesitated.

"Well?" he said at last, finding me still silent.

"I do not think that I can," I answered, flushing.

"Can support it?"

"No," I said.

He laughed genially. "Pooh!" he said. "I think that you will. I want your promise, Vicomte. It is a small matter; a trifle, and of no importance; but we must be unanimous. That is the one thing necessary."

I shook my head. We had both come to a halt under the trees, a little within the gates. His servant was leading the horses up and down the road.

"Come," he persisted pleasantly: "you do not think that anything is going to come of this chaotic States General, which his Majesty was mad enough to let Neckar summon? They met on the 4th of May; this is the 17th of July; and to this date they have done nothing but wrangle! Nothing! Presently they will be dismissed, and there will be an end of it!"

"Why protest, then?" I said rather feebly.

"I will tell you, my friend," he answered, smiling indulgently and tapping his boot with his whip. "Have you heard the latest news?"

"What is it?" I replied cautiously. "Then I will tell you if I have heard it."

"The King has dismissed Neckar!"

"No!" I cried, unable to hide my surprise.

"Yes," he answered; "the banker is dismissed. In a week his States General or National Assembly, or whatever he pleases to call it, will go too, and we shall be where we were before. Only, in the meantime, and to strengthen the King in the wise course he is at last pursuing, we must show that we are alive. We must show our sympathy with him. We must act. We must protest."

"But, M. le Marquis," I said, a little heated, perhaps, by the news, "are you sure that the people will quietly endure this? Never was so bitter a winter as last winter; never a worse harvest, or such pinching. On the top of these, their hopes have been raised, and their minds excited by the elections, and-

"Whom have we to thank for that?" he said, with a whimsical glance at me. "But, never fear, Vicomte; they will endure it. I know Paris; and I can assure you that it is not the Paris of the Fronde, though M. de Mirabeau would play the Retz. It is a peaceable, sensible Paris, and it will not rise. Except a bread riot or two, it has seen no rising to speak of for a century and a half: nothing that two companies of Swiss could not deal with as easily as D'Argenson cleared the Cour des Miracles. Believe me, there is no danger of that kind: with the least management, all will go well!"

But his news had roused my antagonism. I found it more easy to resist him now.

"I do not know," I said coldly; "I do not think that the matter is so simple as you say. The King must have money, or be bankrupt; the people have no money to pay him. I do not see how things can go back to the old state."

M. de St. Alais looked at me with a gleam of anger in his eyes.

"You mean, Vicomte," he said, "that you do not wish them to go back?"

"I mean that the old state was impossible," I said stiffly. "It could not last. It cannot return."

For a moment he did not answer, and we stood confronting one another-he just without, I just within, the gateway-the cool foliage stretching over us, the dust and July sunshine in the road beyond him; and if my face reflected his, it was flushed, and set, and determined. But in a twinkling his changed; he broke into an easy, polite laugh, and shrugged his shoulders with a touch of contempt.

"Well," he said, "we will not argue; but I hope that you will sign. Think it over, M. le Vicomte, think it over. Because" – he paused, and looked at me gaily-"we do not know what may be depending upon it."

"That is a reason," I answered quickly, "for thinking more before I-

"It is a reason for thinking more before you refuse," he said, bowing very low, and this time without smiling. Then he turned to his horse, and his servant held the stirrup while he mounted. When he was in the saddle and had gathered up the reins, he bent his face to mine.

"Of course," he said, speaking in a low voice, and with a searching look at me, "a contract is a contract, M. le Vicomte; and the Montagues and Capulets, like your *carcan*, are out of date. But, all the same, we must go one way-*comprenez-vous?*-we must go one way-or separate! At least, I think so."

And nodding pleasantly, as if he had uttered in these words a compliment instead of a threat, he rode off; leaving me to stand and fret and fume, and finally to stride back under the trees with my thoughts in a whirl, and all my plans and hopes jarring one another in a petty copy of the confusion that that day prevailed, though I guessed it but dimly, from one end of France to the other.

For I could not be blind to his meaning; nor ignorant that he had, no matter how politely, bidden me choose between the alliance with his family, which my father had arranged for me, and the political views in which my father had brought me up, and which a year's residence in England had not failed to strengthen. Alone in the Château since my father's death, I had lived a good deal in the future-in day-dreams of Denise de St. Alais, the fair girl who was to be my wife, and whom I had not seen since she went to her convent school; in day-dreams, also, of work to be done in spreading round me the prosperity I had seen in England. Now, St. Alais' words menaced one or other of these prospects; and that was bad enough. But, in truth, it was not that, so much as his presumption, that stung me; that made me swear one moment and laugh the next, in a kind of irritation not difficult to understand. I was twenty-two, he was twenty-seven; and he dictated to me! We were country bumpkins, he of the *haute politique*, and he had come from Versailles or from Paris to drill us! If I went his way I might marry his sister; if not, I might not! That was the position.

No wonder that before he had left me half an hour I had made up my mind to resist him; and so spent the rest of the day composing sound and unanswerable reasons for the course I intended to take; now conning over a letter in which M. de Liancourt set forth his plan of reform, now summarising the opinions with which M. de Rochefoucauld had favoured me on his last journey to Luchon. In half an hour and the heat of temper! thinking no more than ten thousand others, who that week chose one of two courses, what I was doing. Gargouf, the St. Alais' steward, who doubtless heard that day the news of Neckar's fall, and rejoiced, had no foresight of what it meant to him. Father Benôit, the cure, who supped with me that evening, and heard the tidings with sorrow-he, too, had no special vision. And the innkeeper's son at La Bastide, by Cahors-probably he, also, heard the news; but no shadow of a sceptre fell across his path, nor any of a *bâton* on that of the notary at the other La Bastide. A notary, a *bâton*! An innkeeper, a sceptre! *Mon Dieu!* what conjunctions they would have seemed in those days! We should have been wiser than Daniel, and more prudent than Joseph, if we had foreseen such things under the old *régime*-in the old France, in the old world, that died in that month of July, 1789!

And yet there were signs, even then, to be read by those with eyes, that foretold something, if but a tithe of the inconceivable future; of which signs I myself remarked sufficient by the way next day to fill my mind with other thoughts than private resentment; with some nobler aims than self-assertion. Riding to Cahors, with Gil and André at my back, I saw not only the havoc caused by the great frosts of the winter and spring, not only walnut trees blackened and withered, vines stricken, rye killed, a huge proportion of the land fallow, desert, gloomy and unsown: not only those common signs of poverty to which use had accustomed me-though on my first return from England I had viewed them with horror-mud cabins, I mean, and unglazed windows, starved cattle, and women bent double, gathering weeds. But I saw other things more ominous; a strange herding of men at cross-roads and bridges, where they waited for they knew not what; a something lowering in these men's silence, a something expectant in their faces; worst of all, a something dangerous in their scowling eyes and sunken cheeks. Hunger had pinched them; the elections had roused them. I trembled to think of the issue, and that in the hint of danger I had given St. Alais, I had been only too near the mark.

A league farther on, where the woodlands skirt Cahors, I lost sight of these things; but for a time only. They reappeared presently in another form. The first view of the town, as, girt by the shining Lot, and protected by ramparts and towers, it nestles under the steep hills, is apt to take the eye; its matchless bridge, and time-worn Cathedral, and great palace seldom failing to rouse the admiration even of those who know them. But that day I saw none of these things. As I passed down towards the market-place they were selling grain under a guard of soldiers with fixed bayonets; and the starved faces of the waiting crowd that filled all that side of the square, their shrunken, half-naked figures, and dark looks, and the sullen muttering, which seemed so much at odds with the sunshine, occupied me, to the exclusion of everything else.

Or not quite. I had eyes for one other thing, and that was the astonishing indifference with which those whom curiosity, or business, or habit had brought to the spot, viewed this spectacle. The inns were full of the gentry of the province, come to the Assembly; they looked on from the windows, as at a show, and talked and jested as if at home in their châteaux. Before the doors of the Cathedral a group of ladies and clergymen walked to and fro, and now and then they turned a listless eye on what was passing; but for the most part they seemed to be unconscious of it, or, at the best, to have no concern with it. I have heard it said since, that in those days we had two worlds in France, as far apart as hell and heaven; and what I saw that evening went far to prove it.

In the square a shop at which pamphlets and journals were sold was full of customers, though other shops in the neighbourhood were closed, their owners fearing mischief. On the skirts of the crowd, and a little aloof from it, I saw Gargouf, the St. Alais' steward. He was talking to a countryman; and, as I passed, I heard him say with a gibe, "Well, has your National Assembly fed you yet?"

"Not yet," the clown answered stupidly, "but I am told that in a few days they will satisfy everybody."

"Not they!" the agent answered brutally. "Why, do you think that they will feed you?"

"Oh, yes, by your leave; it is certain," the man said. "And, besides, every one is agreed-"

But then Gargouf saw me, saluted me, and I heard no more. A moment later, however, I came on one of my own people, Buton, the blacksmith, in the middle of a muttering group. He looked at me sheepishly, finding himself caught; and I stopped, and rated him soundly, and saw him start for home before I went to my quarters.

These were at the Trois Rois, where I always lay when in town; Doury, the innkeeper, providing a supper ordinary for the gentry at eight o'clock, at which it was the custom to dress and powder.

The St. Alais had their own house in Cahors, and, as the Marquis had forewarned me, entertained that evening. The greater part of the company, indeed, repaired to them after the meal. I went myself a little late, that I might avoid any private talk with the Marquis; I found the rooms already full and brilliantly lighted, the staircase crowded with valets, and the strains of a harpsichord trickling melodiously from the windows. Madame de St. Alais was in the habit of entertaining the best company in the province; with less splendour, perhaps, than some, but with so much ease, and taste, and good breeding, that I look in vain for such a house in these days.

Ordinarily, she preferred to people her rooms with pleasant groups, that, gracefully disposed, gave to a *salon* an air elegant and pleasing, and in character with the costume of those days, the silks and laces, powder and diamonds, the full hoops and red-heeled shoes. But on this occasion the crowd and the splendour of the entertainment apprised me, as soon as I crossed the threshold, that I was assisting at a party of more than ordinary importance; nor had I advanced far before I guessed that it was a political rather than a social gathering. All, or almost all, who would attend the Assembly next day were here; and though, as I wound my way through the glittering crowd, I heard very little serious talk-so little, that I marvelled to think that people could discuss the respective merits of French and Italian opera, of Grétry and Bianchi, and the like, while so much hung in the balance-of the effect intended I had no doubt; nor that Madame, in assembling all the wit and beauty of the province, was aiming at things higher than amusement.

With, I am bound to confess, a degree of success. At any rate it was difficult to mix with the throng which filled her rooms, to run the gauntlet of bright eyes and witty tongues, to breathe the atmosphere laden with perfume and music, without falling under the spell, without forgetting. Inside the door M. de Gontaut, one of my father's oldest friends, was talking with the two Harincourts. He greeted me with a sly smile, and pointed politely inwards.

"Pass on, Monsieur," he said. "The farthest room. Ah! my friend, I wish I were young again!"

"Your gain would be my loss, M. le Baron," I said civilly, and slid by him. Next, I had to speak to two or three ladies, who detained me with wicked congratulations of the same kind; and then I came on Louis. He clasped my hand, and we stood a moment together. The crowd elbowed us; a simpering fool at his shoulder was prating of the social contract. But as I felt the pressure of Louis' hand, and looked into his eyes, it seemed to me that a breath of air from the woods penetrated the room, and swept aside the heavy perfumes.

Yet there was trouble in his look. He asked me if I had seen Victor.

"Yesterday," I said, understanding him perfectly, and what was amiss. "Not to-day."

"Nor Denise?"

"No. I have not had the honour of seeing Mademoiselle."

"Then, come," he answered. "My mother expected you earlier. What did you think of Victor?"

"That he went Victor, and has returned a great personage!" I said, smiling.

Louis laughed faintly, and lifted his eyebrows with a comical air of sufferance.

"I was afraid so," he said. "He did not seem to be very well pleased with you. But we must all do his bidding-eh, Monsieur? And, in the meantime, come. My mother and Denise are in the farthest room."

He led the way thither as he spoke; but we had first to go through the card-room, and then the crowd about the farther doorway was so dense that we could not immediately enter; and so I had time-while outwardly smiling and bowing-to feel a little suspense. At last we slipped through and entered a smaller room, where were only Madame la Marquise-who was standing in the middle of the floor talking with the Abbé Mesnil-two or three ladies, and Denise de St. Alais.

Mademoiselle had her seat on a couch by one of the ladies; and naturally my eyes went first to her. She was dressed in white, and it struck me with the force of a blow how small, how childish she was! Very fair, of the purest complexion, and perfectly formed, she seemed to derive an extravagant, an absurd, air of dignity from the formality of her dress, from the height of the powdered hair that strained upwards from her forehead, from the stiffness of her brocaded petticoat. But she was very small. I had time to note this, to feel a little disappointment, and to fancy that, cast in a larger mould, she would have been supremely handsome; and then the lady beside her, seeing me, spoke to her, and the child-she was really little more-looked up, her face grown crimson. Our eyes met-thank God! she had Louis' eyes-and she looked down again, blushing painfully.

I advanced to pay my respects to Madame, and kissed the hand, which, without at once breaking off her conversation, she extended to me.

"But such powers!" the Abbé, who had something of the reputation of a *philosophe*, was saying to her. "Without limit! Without check! Misused, Madame-"

"But the King is too good!" Madame la Marquise answered, smiling.

"When well advised, I agree. But then the deficit?"

The Marquise shrugged her shoulders. "His Majesty must have money," she said.

"Yes-but whence?" the Abbé asked, with answering shrug.

"The King was too good at the beginning," Madame replied, with a touch of severity. "He should have made them register the edicts. However, the Parliament has always given way, and will do so again."

"The Parliament-yes," the Abbé retorted, smiling indulgently. "But it is no longer a question of the Parliament; and the States General-"

"States General pass," Madame responded grandly. "The King remains!"

"Yet if trouble comes?"

"It will not," Madame answered with the same grand air. "His Majesty will prevent it." And then with a word or two more she dismissed the Abbé and turned to me. She tapped me on the shoulder with her fan. "Ah! truant," she said, with a glance in which kindness and a little austerity were mingled. "I do not know what I am to say to you! Indeed, from the account Victor gave me yesterday, I hardly knew whether to expect you this evening or not. Are you sure that it is you who are here?"

"I will answer for my heart, Madame," I answered, laying my hand upon it.

Her eyes twinkled kindly.

"Then," she said, "bring it where it is due, Monsieur." And she turned with a fine air of ceremony, and led me to her daughter. "Denise," she said, "this is M. le Vicomte de Saux, the son of my old, my good friend. M. le Vicomte-my daughter. Perhaps you will amuse her while I go back to the Abbé."

Probably Mademoiselle had spent the evening in an agony of shyness, expecting this moment; for she curtesied to the floor, and then stood dumb and confused, forgetting even to sit down, until I covered her with fresh blushes by begging her to do so. When she had complied, I took my stand before her, with my hat in my hand; but between seeking for the right compliment, and trying to trace a likeness between her and the wild, brown-faced child of thirteen, whom I had known four years before-and from the dignified height of nineteen immeasurably despised-I grew shy myself.

"You came home last week, Mademoiselle?" I said at last.

"Yes, Monsieur," she answered, in a whisper, and with downcast eyes.

"It must be a great change for you!"

"Yes, Monsieur."

Silence: then, "Doubtless the Sisters were good to you?" I suggested.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Yet, you were not sorry to leave?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

But on that the meaning of what she had last said came home to her, or she felt the banality of her answers; for, on a sudden, she looked swiftly up at me, her face scarlet, and, if I was not mistaken, she was within a little of bursting into tears. The thought appalled me. I stooped lower.

"Mademoiselle!" I said hurriedly, "pray do not be afraid of me. Whatever happens, you shall never have need to fear me. I beg of you to look on me as a friend-as your brother's friend. Louis is my-"

Crash! While the name hung on my lips, something struck me on the back, and I staggered forward, almost into her arms; amid a shiver of broken glass, a flickering of lights, a rising chorus of screams and cries. For a moment I could not think what was happening, or had happened; the blow had taken away my breath. I was conscious only of Mademoiselle clinging terrified to my arm, of her face, wild with fright, looking up to me, of the sudden cessation of the music. Then, as people pressed in on us, and I began to recover, I turned and saw that the window behind me had been driven in, and the lead and panes shattered; and that among the *débris* on the floor lay a great stone. It was that which had struck me.

CHAPTER II.
THE ORDEAL

It was wonderful how quickly the room filled-filled with angry faces, so that almost before I knew what had happened, I found a crowd round me, asking what it was; M. de St. Alais foremost. As all spoke at once, and in the background where they could not see, ladies were screaming and chattering, I might have found it difficult to explain. But the shattered window and the great stone on the floor spoke for themselves, and told more quickly than I could what had taken place.

On the instant, with a speed which surprised me, the sight blew into a flame passions already smouldering. A dozen voices cried, "Out on the *canaille!*" In a moment some one in the background followed this up with "Swords, Messieurs, swords!" Then, in a trice half the gentlemen were elbowing one another towards the door, St. Alais, who burned to avenge the insult offered to his guests, taking the lead. M. de Gontaut and one or two of the elders tried to restrain him, but their remonstrances were in vain, and in a moment the room was almost emptied of men. They poured out into the street, and began to scour it with drawn blades and raised voices. A dozen valets, running out officiously with flambeaux, aided in the search; for a few minutes the street, as we who remained viewed it from the windows, seemed to be alive with moving lights and figures.

But the rascals who had flung the stone, whatever the motive which inspired them, had fled in time; and presently our party returned, some a little ashamed of their violence, others laughing as they entered, and bewailing their silk stockings and spattered shoes; while a few, less fashionable or more impetuous, continued to denounce the insult, and threaten vengeance. At another time, the act might have seemed trivial, a childish insult; but in the strained state of public feeling it had an unpleasant and menacing air which was not lost on the more thoughtful. During the absence of the street party, the draught from the broken window had blown a curtain against some candles and set it alight; and though the stuff had been torn down with little damage, it still smoked among the *débris* on the floor. This, with the startled faces of the ladies, and the shattered glass, gave a look of disorder and ruin to the room, where a few minutes before all had worn so seemly and festive an air.

It did not surprise me, therefore, that St. Alais' face, stern enough at his entrance, grew darker as he looked round.

"Where is my sister?" he said abruptly, almost rudely.

"Here," Madame la Marquise answered. Denise had flown long before to her side, and was clinging to her.

"She is not hurt?"

"No," Madame answered, playfully tapping the girl's cheek. "M. de Saux had most reason to complain."

"Save me from my friends, eh, Monsieur?" St. Alais said, with an unpleasant smile.

I started. The words were not much in themselves, but the sneer underlying them was plain. I could scarcely pass it by. "If you think, M. le Marquis," I said sharply, "that I knew anything of this outrage-"

"That you knew anything? *Ma foi*, no!" he replied lightly, and with a courtly gesture of deprecation. "We have not fallen to that yet. That any gentleman in this company should sink to play the fellow to those-is not possible! But I think we may draw a useful lesson from this, Messieurs," he continued, turning from me and addressing the company. "And that is a lesson to hold our own, or we shall soon lose all."

A hum of approbation ran round the room.

"To maintain privileges, or we shall lose rights."

Twenty voices were raised in assent.

"To stand now," he continued, his colour high, his hand raised, "or never!"

"Then now! Now!"

The cry rose suddenly not from one, but from a hundred throats-of men and women; in a moment the room catching his tone seemed to throb with enthusiasm, with the pulse of resolve. Men's eyes grew bright under the candles, they breathed quickly, and with heightened colour. Even the weakest felt the influence; the fool who had prated of the social contract and the rights of man was as loud as any. "Now! Now!" they cried with one voice.

What followed on that I have never completely fathomed; nor whether it was a thing arranged, or merely an inspiration, born of the common enthusiasm. But while the windows still shook with that shout, and every eye was on him, M. de Alais stepped forward, the most gallant and perfect figure, and with a splendid gesture drew his sword.

"Gentlemen!" he cried, "we are of one mind, of one voice. Let us be also in the fashion. If, while all the world is fighting to get and hold, we alone stand still and on the defensive-we court attack, and, what is worse, defeat! Let us unite then, while it is still time, and show that, in Quercy at least, our Order will stand or fall together. You have heard of the oath of the Tennis Court and the 20th of June. Let us, too, take an oath-this 22nd of July; not with uplifted hands like a club of wordy debaters, promising all things to all men; but with uplifted swords. As nobles and gentlemen, let us swear to stand by the rights, the privileges, and the exemptions of our Order!"

A shout that made the candles flicker and jump, that filled the street, and was heard even in the distant market-place, greeted the proposal. Some drew their swords at once, and flourished them above their heads; while ladies waved their fans or kerchiefs. But the majority cried, "To the larger room! To the larger room!" And on the instant, as if in obedience to an order, the company turned that way, and flushed, and eager, pressed through the narrow doorway into the next room.

There may have been some among them less enthusiastic than others; some more earnest in show than at heart; none, I am sure, who, on this, followed so slowly, so reluctantly, with so heavy a heart, and sure a presage of evil as I did. Already I foresaw the dilemma before me; but angry, hot-faced, and uncertain, I could discern no way out of it.

If I could have escaped, and slipped clear from the room, I would have done so without scruple; but the stairs were on the farther side of the great room which we were entering, and a dense crowd cut me off from them; moreover, I felt that St. Alais' eye was upon me, and that, if he had not framed the ordeal to meet my case, and extort my support, he was at least determined, now that his blood was fired, that I should not evade it.

Still I would not hasten the evil day, and I lingered near the inner door, hoping; but the Marquis, on reaching the middle of the room, mounted a chair and turned round; and so contrived still to face me. The mob of gentlemen formed themselves round him, the younger and more tumultuous uttering cries of "*Vive la Noblesse!*" And a fringe of ladies encircled all. The lights, the brilliant dresses and jewels on which they shone, the impassioned faces, the waving kerchiefs and bright eyes, rendered the scene one to be remembered, though at the moment I was conscious only of St. Alais' gaze.

"Messieurs," he cried, "draw your swords, if you please!"

They flashed out at the word, with a steely glitter which the mirrors reflected; and M. de St. Alais passed his eye slowly round, while all waited for the word. He stopped; his eye was on me.

"M. de Saux," he said politely, "we are waiting for you."

Naturally all turned to me. I strove to mutter something, and signed to him with my hand to go on. But I was too much confused to speak clearly; my only hope was that he would comply, out of prudence.

But that was the last thing he thought of doing. "Will you take your place, Monsieur?" he said smoothly.

Then I could escape no longer. A hundred eyes, some impatient, some merely curious, rested on me. My face burned.

"I cannot do so," I answered.

There fell a great silence from one end of the room to the other.

"Why not, Monsieur, if I may ask?" St. Alais said still smoothly.

"Because I am not-entirely at one with you," I stammered, meeting all eyes as bravely as I could. "My opinions are known, M. de St. Alais," I went on more steadfastly. "I cannot swear."

He stayed with his hand a dozen who would have cried out upon me.

"Gently, Messieurs," he said, with a gesture of dignity, "gently, if you please. This is no place for threats. M. de Saux is my guest; and I have too great a respect for him not to respect his scruples. But I think that there is another way. I shall not venture to argue with him myself. But-Madame," he continued, smiling as he turned with an inimitable air to his mother, "I think that if you would permit Mademoiselle de St. Alais to play the recruiting-sergeant-for this one time-she could not fail to heal the breach."

A murmur of laughter and subdued applause, a flutter of fans and women's eyes greeted the proposal. But, for a moment, Madame la Marquise, smiling and sphinx-like, stood still, and did not speak. Then she turned to her daughter, who, at the mention of her name, had cowered back, shrinking from sight.

"Go, Denise," she said simply. "Ask M. de Saux to honour you by becoming your recruit."

The girl came forward slowly, and with a visible tremor; nor shall I ever forget the misery of that moment, or the shame and obstinacy that alternately surged through my brain as I awaited her. Thought, quicker than lightning, showed me the trap into which I had fallen, a trap far more horrible than the dilemma I had foreseen. Nor was the poor girl herself, as she stood before me, tortured by shyness, and stammering her little petition in words barely intelligible, the least part of my pain.

For to refuse her, in face of all those people, seemed a thing impossible. It seemed a thing as brutal as to strike her; an act as cruel, as churlish, as unworthy of a gentleman as to trample any helpless sensitive thing under foot! And I felt that; I felt it to the utmost. But I felt also that to assent was to turn my back on consistency, and my life; to consent to be a dupe, the victim of a ruse; to be a coward, though every one there might applaud me. I saw both these things, and for a moment I hesitated between rage and pity; while lights and fair faces, inquisitive or scornful, shifted mazily before my eyes. At last-

"Mademoiselle, I cannot," I muttered. "I cannot."

"Monsieur!"

It was not the girl's word, but Madame's, and it rang high and sharp through the room; so that I thanked God for the intervention. It cleared in a moment the confusion from my brain. I became myself. I turned to her; I bowed.

"No, Madame, I cannot," I said firmly, doubting no longer, but stubborn, defiant, resolute. "My opinions are known. And I will not, even for Mademoiselle's sake, give the lie to them."

As the last word fell from my lips, a glove, flung by an unseen hand, struck me on the cheek; and then for a moment the room seemed to go mad. Amid a storm of hisses, of "*Vaurien!*" and "*A bas le traître!*" a dozen blades were brandished in my face, a dozen challenges were flung at my head. I had not learned at that time how excitable is a crowd, how much less merciful than any member of it; and surprised and deafened by the tumult, which the shrieks of the ladies did not tend to diminish, I recoiled a pace.

M. de St. Alais took advantage of the moment. He sprang down, and thrusting aside the blades which threatened me, flung himself in front of me.

"Messieurs, listen!" he cried, above the uproar. "Listen, I beg! This gentleman is my guest. He is no longer of us, but he must go unharmed. A way! A way, if you please, for M. le Vicomte de Saux."

They obeyed him reluctantly, and falling back to one side or the other, opened a way across the room to the door. He turned to me, and bowed low-his courtliest bow.

"This way, Monsieur le Vicomte, if you please," he said. "Madame la Marquise will not trespass on your time any longer."

I followed him with a burning face, down the narrow lane of shining parquet, under the chandelier, between the lines of mocking eyes; and not a man interposed. In dead silence I followed him to the door. There he stood aside, and bowed to me, and I to him; and I walked out mechanically-walked out alone.

I passed through the lobby. The crowd of peeping, grinning lackeys that filled it stared at me, all eyes; but I was scarcely conscious of their impertinence or their presence. Until I reached the street, and the cold air revived me, I went like a man stunned, and unable to think. The blow had fallen on me so suddenly, so unexpectedly.

When I did come a little to myself, my first feeling was rage. I had gone into M. de St. Alais' house that evening, possessing everything; I came out, stripped of friends, reputation, my betrothed! I had gone in, trusting to his friendship, the friendship that was a tradition in our families; he had worsted me by a trick. I stood in the street, and groaned as I thought of it; as I pictured the sorry figure I had cut amongst them, and reflected on what was before me.

For, presently, I began to think that I had been a fool-that I should have given way. I could not, as I stood in the street there, foresee the future; nor know for certain that the old France was passing, and that even now, in Paris, its death-knell had gone forth. I had to live by the opinions of the people round me; to think, as I paced the streets, how I should face the company to-morrow, and whether I should fly, or whether I should fight. For in the meeting on the morrow-

Ah! the Assembly. The word turned my thoughts into a new channel. I could have my revenge there. That I might not raise a jarring note *there*, they had cajoled me, and when cajolery failed, had insulted me. Well, I would show them that the new way would succeed no better than the old, and that where they had thought to suppress a Saux they had raised a Mirabeau. From this point I passed the night in a fever. Resentment spurred ambition; rage against my caste, a love of the people. Every sign of misery and famine that had passed before my eyes during the day recurred now, and was garnered for use. The early daylight found me still pacing my room, still thinking, composing, reciting; when André, my old body-servant, who had been also my father's, came at seven with a note in his hand, I was still in my clothes.

Doubtless he had heard downstairs a garbled account of what had occurred, and my cheek burned. I took no notice of his gloomy looks, however, but, without speaking, I opened the note. It was not signed, but the handwriting was Louis'.

"Go home," it ran, "and do not show yourself at the Assembly. They will challenge you one by one; the event is certain. Leave Cahors at once, or you are a dead man."

That was all! I smiled bitterly at the weakness of the man who could do no more for his friend than this.

"Who gave it to you?" I asked André.

"A servant, Monsieur."

"Whose?"

But he muttered that he did not know; and I did not press him. He assisted me to change my dress; when I had done, he asked me at what hour I needed the horses.

"The horses! For what?" I said, turning and staring at him.

"To return, Monsieur."

"But I do not return to-day!" I said in cold displeasure. "Of what are you speaking? We came only yesterday."

"True, Monsieur," he muttered, continuing to potter over my dressing things, and keeping his back to me. "Still, it is a good day for returning."

"You have been reading this note!" I cried wrathfully. "Who told you that-"

"All the town knows!" he answered, shrugging his shoulders coolly. "It is, 'André, take your master home!' and, 'André, you have a hot-pate for a master,' and André this, and André that, until I am fairly muddled! Gil has a bloody nose, fighting a Harincourt lad that called Monsieur a fool; but for me, I am too old for fighting. And there is one other thing I am too old for," he continued, with a sniff.

"What is that, impertinent?" I cried.

"To bury another master."

I waited a minute. Then I said: "You think that I shall be killed?"

"It is the talk of the town!"

I thought a moment. Then: "You served my father, André," I said.

"Ah! Monsieur."

"Yet you would have me run away?"

He turned to me, and flung up his hands in despair.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he cried, "I don't know what I would have! We are ruined by these *canaille*. As if God made them to do anything but dig and work; or we could do without poor! If you had never taken up with them, Monsieur-"

"Silence, man!" I said sternly. "You know nothing about it. Go down now, and another time be more careful. You talk of the *canaille* and the poor! What are you yourself?"

"I, Monsieur?" he cried, in astonishment.

"Yes-you!"

He stared at me a moment with a face of bewilderment. Then slowly and sorrowfully he shook his head, and went out. He began to think me mad.

When he was gone I did not at once move. I fancied it likely that if I showed myself in the streets before the Assembly met, I should be challenged, and forced to fight. I waited, therefore, until the hour of meeting was past; waited in the dull upper room, feeling the bitterness of isolation, and thinking, sometimes of Louis St. Alais, who had let me go, and spoken no word in my behalf, sometimes of men's unreasonableness; for in some of the provinces half of the nobility were of my way of thinking. I thought of Saux, too; and I will not say that I felt no temptation to adopt the course which André had suggested-to withdraw quietly thither, and then at some later time, when men's minds were calmer, to vindicate my courage. But a certain stubbornness, which my father had before me, and which I have heard people say comes of an English strain in the race, conspired with resentment to keep me in the way I had marked out. At a quarter past ten, therefore, when I thought that the last of the Members would have preceded me to the Assembly, I went downstairs, with hot cheeks, but eyes that were stern enough; and finding André and Gil waiting at the door, bade them follow me to the Chapter House beside the Cathedral, where the meetings were held.

Afterwards I was told that, had I used my eyes, I must have noticed the excitement which prevailed in the streets; the crowd, dense, yet silent, that filled the Square and all the neighbouring ways; the air of expectancy, the closed shops, the cessation of business, the whispering groups in alleys and at doors. But I was wrapped up in myself, like one going on a forlorn hope; and of all remarked only one thing-that as I crossed the Square a man called out, "God bless you, Monsieur!" and another, "*Vive Saux!*" and that thereon a dozen or more took off their caps. This I did notice; but mechanically only. The next moment I was in the entry which leads alongside one wall of the Cathedral to the Chapter House, and a crowd of clerks and servants, who blocked it almost from wall to wall, were making way for me to pass; not without looks of astonishment and curiosity.

Threading my way through them, I entered the empty vestibule, kept clear by two or three ushers. Here the change from sunshine to shadow, from the life and light and stir which prevailed outside, to the silence of this vaulted chamber, was so great that it struck a chill to my heart. Here, in the greyness and stillness, the importance of the step I was about to take, the madness of the challenge I was about to fling down, in the teeth of my brethren, rose before me; and if my mind had not been braced to the utmost by resentment and obstinacy, I must have turned back. But already my feet rang noisily on the stone pavement, and forbade retreat. I could hear a monotonous voice droning in the Chamber beyond the closed door; and I crossed to that door, setting my teeth hard, and preparing myself to play the man, whatever awaited me.

Another moment, and I should have been inside. My hand was already on the latch, when some one, who had been sitting on the stone bench in the shadow under the window, sprang up, and hurried to stop me. It was Louis de St. Alais. He reached me before I could open the door, and, thrusting himself in front of me, set his back against the panels.

"Stop, man! for God's sake, stop!" he cried passionately, yet kept his voice low. "What can one do against two hundred? Go back, man, go back, and I will-"

"*You will!*" I answered with fierce contempt, yet in the same low tone-the ushers were staring curiously at us from the door by which I had entered. "You will? You will do, I suppose, as much as you did last night, Monsieur."

"Never mind that now!" he answered earnestly; though he winced, and the colour rose to his brow. "Only go! Go to Saux, and-"

"Keep out of the way!"

"Yes," he said, "and keep out of the way. If you will do that-"

"Keep out of the way?" I repeated savagely.

"Yes, yes; then everything will blow over."

"Thank you!" I said slowly; and I trembled with rage. "And how much, may I ask, are you to have, M. le Comte, for ridding the Assembly of me?"

He stared at me. "Adrien!" he cried.

But I was ruthless. "No, Monsieur le Comte-not Adrien!" I said proudly; "I am that only to my friends."

"And I am no longer one?"

I raised my eyebrows contemptuously. "*After last night?*" I said. "After last night? Is it possible, Monsieur, that you fancy you played a friendly part? I came into your house, your guest, your friend, your all but relative; and you laid a trap for me, you held me up to ridicule and odium, you-"

"I did?" he exclaimed.

"Perhaps not with your own voice. But you stood by and saw it done! You stood by and said no word for me! You stood by and raised no finger for me! If you call that friendship-"

He stopped me with a gesture full of dignity. "You forget one thing, M. le Vicomte," he said, in a tone of proud reticence.

"Name it!" I answered disdainfully.

"That Mademoiselle de St. Alais is my sister!"

"Ah!"

"And that, whether the fault was yours or not, you last evening treated her lightly-before two hundred people! You forget that, M. le Vicomte."

"I treated her lightly?" I replied, in a fresh excess of rage. We had moved, as if by common consent, a little from the door, and by this time were glaring into one another's eyes. "And with whom lay the fault if I did? With whom lay the fault, Monsieur? You gave me the choice-nay, you forced me to make choice between slighting her and giving up opinions and convictions which I hold, in which I have been bred, in which-"

"*Opinions!*" he said more harshly than he had yet spoken. "And what are, after all, opinions? Pardon me, I see that I annoy you, Monsieur. But I am not philosophic; I have not been to England; and I cannot understand a man-"

"Giving up anything for his opinions!" I cried, with a savage sneer. "No, Monsieur, I daresay you cannot. If a man will not stand by his friends he will not stand by his opinions. To do either the one or the other, M. le Comte, a man must not be a coward."

He grew pale, and looked at me strangely. "Hush, Monsieur!" he said-involuntarily, it seemed to me. And a spasm crossed his face, as if a sharp pain shot through him.

But I was beside myself with passion. "A coward!" I repeated. "Do you understand me, M. le Comte? Or do you wish me to go inside and repeat the word before the Assembly?"

"There is no need," he said, growing as red as he had before been pale.

"There should be none," I answered, with a sneer. "May I conclude that you will meet me after the Assembly rises?"

He bowed without speaking; and then, and not till then, something in his silence and his looks pierced the armour of my rage; and on a sudden I grew sick at heart, and cold. It was too late, however; I had said that which could never be unsaid. The memory of his patience, of his goodness, of his forbearance, came after the event. I saluted him formally; he replied; and I turned grimly to the door again.

But I was not to pass through it yet.

A second time when I had the latch in my grasp, and the door an inch open, a hand plucked me back; so forcibly, that the latch rattled as it fell, and I turned in a rage. To my astonishment it was Louis again, but with a changed face-a face of strange excitement. He retained his hold on me.

"No," he said, between his teeth. "You have called me a coward, M. le Vicomte, and I will not wait! Not an hour. You shall fight me now. There is a garden at the back, and-"

But I had grown as cold as he hot. "I shall do nothing of the kind," I said, cutting him short. "After the Assembly-"

He raised his hand and deliberately struck me with his glove across the face.

"Will that persuade you, then?" he said, as I involuntarily recoiled. "After that, Monsieur, if you are a gentleman, you will fight me. There is a garden at the back, and in ten minutes-"

"In ten minutes the Assembly may have risen," I said.

"I will not keep you so long!" he answered sternly. "Come, sir! Or must I strike you again?"

"I will come," I said slowly. "After you, Monsieur."

CHAPTER III.
IN THE ASSEMBLY

The blow, and the insult with which he accompanied it, put an end for the moment to my repentance. But short as was the distance across the floor from the one door to the other, it gave me time to think again; to remember that this was Louis; and that whatever cause I had had to complain of him, whatever grounds to suspect that he was the tool of others, no friend could have done more to assuage my wrath, nor the most honest more to withhold me from entering on an impossible task. Melting quickly, melting almost instantly, I felt with a kind of horror that if kindness alone had led him to interpose, I had made him the worst return in the world; in fine, before the outer door could be opened to us, I repented anew. When the usher held it for me to pass, I bade him close it, and, to Louis' surprise, turned, and, muttering something, ran back. Before he could do more than utter a cry I was across the vestibule; a moment, and I had the door of the Assembly open.

Instantly I saw before me-I suppose that my hand had raised the latch noisily-tiers of surprised faces all turned my way. I heard a murmur of mingled annoyance and laughter. The next moment I was threading my way to my place with the monotonous voice of the President in my ears, and the scene round me so changed-from that low-toned altercation outside, to this Chamber full of light and life, and thronged with starers-that I sank into my seat, dazzled and abashed; and almost forgetful for the time of the purpose which brought me thither.

A little, and my face grew hotter still; and with good reason. Each of the benches on which we sat held three. I shared mine with one of the Harincourts and M. d'Aulnoy, my place being between them. I had scarcely taken it five seconds, when Harincourt rose slowly, and, without turning his face to me, moved away down the gangway, and, fanning himself delicately with his hat, assumed a leaning position against a desk with his gaze on the President. Half a minute, and D'Aulnoy followed his example. Then the three behind me rose, and quietly and without looking at me found other places. The three before me followed suit. In two minutes I sat alone, isolated, a mark for all eyes; a kind of leper in the Assembly!

I ought to have been prepared for some such demonstration. But I was not, and my cheeks burned, as if the curious looks to which I was exposed were a hot fire. It was impossible for me, taken by surprise, to hide my embarrassment; for, wherever I gazed, I met sneering eyes and contemptuous glances; and pride would not let me hang my head. For many minutes, therefore, I was unconscious of everything but that scorching gaze. I could not hear what was going forward. The President's voice was a dull, meaningless drawl to me.

Yet all the while anger and resentment were hardening me in my resolve; and, presently, the cloud passed from my mind, and left me exulting. The monotonous reading, to which I had listened without understanding it, came to an end, and was followed by short, sharp interrogations-a question and an answer, a name and a reply. It was that awoke me. The drawl had been the reading of the cahier; now they were voting on it.

Presently it would be my turn; it was coming to my turn now. With each vote-I need not say that all were affirmative-more faces, and yet more, were turned to the place where I sat; more eyes, some hostile, some triumphant, some merely curious, were directed to my face. Under other circumstances this might have cowed me; now it did not. I was wrought up to face it. The unfriendly looks of so many who had called themselves my friends, the scornful glances of new men of ennobled families, who had been glad of my father's countenance, the consciousness that all had deserted me merely because I maintained in practice opinions which half of them had proclaimed in words-these things hardened me to a pitch of scorn no whit below that of my opponents; while the knowledge that to blench now must cover me with lasting shame closed the door to thoughts of surrender.

The Assembly, on the other hand, felt the novelty of its position. Men were not yet accustomed to the war of the Senate; to duels of words more deadly than those of the sword: and a certain doubt, a certain hesitation, held the majority in suspense, watching to see what would happen. Moreover, the leaders, both M. de St. Alais, who headed the hotter and prouder party of the Court, and the nobles of the Robe and Parliament, who had only lately discovered that their interest lay in the same direction, found themselves embarrassed by the very smallness of the opposition; since a substantial majority must have been accepted as a fact, whereas one man-one man only standing in the way of unanimity-presented himself as a thing to be removed, if the way could be discovered.

"M. le Comte de Cantal?" the President cried, and looked, not at the person he named, but at me.

"Content!"

"M. le Vicomte de Marignac?"

"Content!"

The next name I could not hear, for in my excitement it seemed that all in the Chamber were looking at me, that voice was failing me, that when the moment came I should sit dumb and paralysed, unable to speak, and for ever disgraced. I thought of this, not of what was passing; then, in a moment, self-control returned; I heard the last name before mine, that of M. d'Aulnoy, heard the answer given. Then my own name, echoing in hollow silence.

"M. le Vicomte de Saux?"

I stood up. I spoke, my voice sounding harsh, and like another man's. "I dissent from this cahier!" I cried.

I expected an outburst of wrath; it did not come. Instead, a peal of laughter, in which I distinguished St. Alais' tones, rang through the room, and brought the blood to my cheeks. The laughter lasted some time, rose and fell, and rose again; while I stood pilloried. Yet this had one effect the laughers did not anticipate. On occasions the most taciturn become eloquent. I forgot the periods from Rochefoucauld and Liancourt, which I had so carefully prepared; I forgot the passages from Turgot, of which I had made notes, and I broke out in a strain I had not foreseen or intended.

"Messieurs!" I cried, hurling my voice through the Chamber, "I dissent from this cahier because it is effete and futile; because, if for no other reason, the time when it could have been of service is past. You claim your privileges; they are gone! Your exemptions; they are gone! You protest against the union of your representatives with those of the people; but they have sat with them! They have sat with them, and you can no more undo that by a protest than you can set back the tide! The thing is done. The dog is hungry, you have given it a bone. Do you think to get the bone back, unmouthed, whole, without loss? Then you are mad. But this is not all, nor the principal of my objections to this cahier. France to-day stands naked, bankrupt, without treasury, without money. Do you think to help her, to clothe her, to enrich her, by maintaining your privileges, by maintaining your exemptions, by standing out for the last jot and tittle of your rights? No, Messieurs. In the old days those exemptions, those rights, those privileges, wherein our ancestors gloried, and gloried well, were given to them because they were the buckler of France. They maintained and armed and led men; the commonalty did the rest. But now the people fight, the people pay, the people do all. Yes, Messieurs, it is true; it is true that which we have all heard, '*Le manant paye pour tout!*'"

I paused; expecting that now, at last, the long-delayed outburst of anger would come. Instead, before any in the Chamber could speak, there rose through the windows, which looked on the market-place, and had been widely opened on account of the heat, a great cry of applause; the shout of the street, that for the first time heard its wrongs voiced. It was full of assent and rejoicing, yet no attack could have disconcerted me more completely. I stood astonished, and silenced.

The effect which it had on me was slight, however, in comparison with that which it had on my opponents. The cries of dissent they were about to utter died stillborn at the portent; and, for a moment, men stared at one another as if they could not believe their ears. For that moment a silence of rage, of surprise, prevailed through the whole Chamber. Then M. de St. Alais sprang to his feet.

"What is this?" he cried, his handsome face dark with excitement. "Has the King ordered us, too, to sit with the third estate? Has he so humiliated us? If not, M. le President-if not, I say," he continued, sternly putting down an attempt at applause, "and if this be not a conspiracy between some of our body and the *canaille* to bring about another Jacquerie-"

The President, a weak man of a Robe family, interrupted him. "Have a care, Monsieur," he said. "The windows are still open."

"Open?"

The President nodded.

"And what if they are? What of it?" St. Alais answered harshly. "What of it, Monsieur?" he continued, looking round him with an eye which seemed to collect and express the scorn of the more fiery spirits. "If so, let it be so! Let them be open. Let the people hear both sides, and not only those who flatter them; those who, by building on their weakness and ignorance, and canting about their rights and our wrongs, think to exalt themselves into Retzs and Cromwells! Yes, Monsieur le President," he continued, while I strove in vain to interrupt him, and half the Assembly rose to their feet in confusion, "I repeat the phrase-who, to the ambition of a Cromwell or a Retz add their violence, not their parts!"

The injustice of the reproach stung me, and I turned on him. "M. le Marquis!" I cried hotly, "if, by that phrase, you refer to me-"

He laughed scornfully. "As you please, Monsieur," he said.

"I fling it back! I repudiate it!" I cried. "M. de St. Alais has called me a Retz-a Cromwell-"

"Pardon me," he interposed swiftly; "a would-be Retz!"

"A traitor, either way!" I answered, striving against the laughter, which at his repartee flashed through the room, bringing the blood rushing to my face. "A traitor either way! But I say that he is the traitor who to-day advises the King to his hurt."

"And not he who comes here with a mob at his back?" St. Alais retorted, with heat almost equal to my own. "Who, one man, would brow-beat a hundred, and dictate to this Assembly?"

"Monsieur repeats himself," I cried, cutting him short in my turn, though no laughter followed my gibe. "I deny what he says. I fling back his accusations; I retort upon him! And, for the rest, I object to this cahier, I dissent from it, I-"

But the Assembly was at the end of its patience. A roar of "Withdraw! withdraw!" drowned my voice, and, in a moment, the meeting so orderly a few minutes before, became a scene of wild uproar. A few of the elder men continued to keep their seats, but the majority rose; some had already sprung to the windows, and closed them, and still stood with their feet on the ledge, looking down on the confusion. Others had gone to the door and taken their stand there, perhaps with the idea of resisting intrusion. The President in vain cried for silence. His voice, equally with mine, was lost in the persistent clamour, which swelled to a louder pitch whenever I offered to speak, and sank only when I desisted.

At length M. de St. Alais raised his hand, and with little difficulty procured silence. Before I could take advantage of it, the President interposed. "The Assembly of the noblesse of Quercy," he said hurriedly, "is in favour of this cahier, maintaining our ancient rights, privileges, and exemptions. The Vicomte de Saux alone protests. The cahier will be presented."

"I protest!" I cried weakly.

"I have said so," the President answered, with a sneer. And a peal of derisive laughter, mingled with shouts of applause, ran round the Chamber. "The cahier will be presented. The matter is concluded."

Then, in a moment, magically, as it seemed to me, the Chamber resumed its ordinary aspect. The Members who had risen returned to their seats, those who had closed the windows descended, a few retired, the President proceeded with some ordinary business. Every trace of the storm disappeared. In a twinkling all was as it had been.

Even where I sat; for no isolation, no division from my fellows could exceed that in which I had sat before. But whereas before I had had my weapon in reserve and my revenge in prospect, that was no longer so. I had shot my bolt, and I sat miserable, fettered by the silence and the strange glances that hemmed me in, and growing each moment more depressed and more self-conscious; longing to escape, yet shrinking from moving, even from looking about me.

In this condition not the least of my misery lay in the reflection that I had done no good; that I had suffered for a quixotism, and shown myself stubborn and obstinate to no purpose. Too late, I considered that I might have maintained my principles and yet conformed; I might have stated my convictions and waived them in deference to the majority. I might have-

But alas! whatever I might have done, I had not done it; and the die was cast. I had declared myself against my order; I had forfeited all I could claim from my order. Henceforth, I was not of it. It was no fancy that already men who had occasion to pass before me drew their skirts aside and bowed formally as to one of another class!

How long I should have endured this penance-these veiled insults and the courtesy that stung deeper-before I plucked up spirit to withdraw, I cannot say. It was an interposition from without that broke the spell. An usher came to me with a note. I opened it with clumsy fingers under a fire of hostile eyes, and found that it was from Louis.

"If you have a spark of honour" – it ran-"you will meet me, without a moment's delay, in the garden at the back of the Chapter House. Do so, and you may still call yourself a gentleman. Refuse, or delay even for ten minutes, and I will publish your shame from one end of Quercy to the other. He cannot call himself Adrien du Pont de Saux, who puts up with a blow!"

I read it twice while the usher waited. The words had a cruel, heartless ring in them; the taunting challenge was brutal in its directness. Yet my heart grew soft as I read, and I had much ado to keep the tears from my eyes-under all those eyes. For Louis did not deceive me this time. This note, so unlike him, this desperate attempt to draw me out, and save me from opponents more ruthless, were too transparent to delude me; and, in a moment, the icy bands which had been growing over me melted. I still sat alone; but I was not quite deserted. I could hold up my head again, for I had a friend. I remembered that, after all, through all, I was Adrien du Pont de Saux, guiltless of aught worse than holding in Quercy opinions which the Lameths and Mirabeaus, the Liancourts and Rochefoucaulds held in their provinces; guiltless, I told myself, of aught besides standing for right and justice.

But the usher waited. I took from the desk before me a scrap of paper, and wrote my answer. "Adrien does not fight with Louis because St. Alais struck Saux."

I wrapped it up and gave it to the usher; then I sat back a different man, able to meet all eyes, with a heart armed against all misfortunes. Friendship, generosity, love, still existed, though the gentry of Quercy, the Gontauts, and Marignacs, sat aloof. Life would still hold sweets, though the grass should grow in the walnut avenue, and my shield should never quarter the arms of St. Alais.

So I took courage, stood up, and moved to go out. But the moment I did so, a dozen Members sprang to their feet also; and, as I walked down one gangway towards the door, they crowded down another parallel with it; offensively, openly, with the evident intention of intercepting me before I could escape. The commotion was so great that the President paused in his reading to watch the result; while the mass of Members who kept their places, rose that they might have a better view. I saw that I was to be publicly insulted, and a fierce joy took the place of every other feeling. If I went slowly, it was not through fear; the pent-up passions of the last hour inspired me, and I would not have hastened the climax for the world. I reached the foot of the gangway, in another moment we must have come into collision, when an abrupt explosion of voices, a great roar in the street, that penetrated through the closed windows, brought us to a halt. We paused, listening and glaring, while the few who had not stood up before, rose hurriedly, and the President, startled and suspicious, asked what it was.

For answer the sound rose again-dull, prolonged, shaking the windows; a hoarse shout of triumph. It fell-not ceasing, but passing away into the distance-and then once more it swelled up. It was unlike any shout I had ever heard.

Little by little articulate words grew out of it, or succeeded it; until the air shook with the measured rhythm of one stern sentence. "*A bas la Bastille! A bas la Bastille!*"

We were to hear many such cries in the time to come, and grow accustomed to such alarms; to the hungry roar in the street, and the loud knocking at the door that spelled fate. But they were a new thing then, and the Assembly, as much outraged as alarmed by this second trespass on its dignity, could only look at its President, and mutter wrathful threats against the *canaille*. The *canaille* that had crouched for a century seemed in some unaccountable way to be changing its posture!

One man cried out one thing, and one another; that the streets should be cleared, the regiment sent for, or complaint made to the Intendant. They were still speaking when the door opened and a Member came in. It was Louis de St. Alais, and his face was aglow with excitement. Commonly the most modest and quiet of men, he stood forward now, and raised his hand imperatively for silence.

"Gentlemen," he said, in a loud, ringing voice, "there is strange news! A courier with letters for my brother, M. de St. Alais, has spoken in the street. He brings strange tidings."

"What?" two or three cried.

"The Bastille has fallen!"

No one understood-how should they? – but all were silent. Then, "What do you mean, M. St. Alais?" the President asked, in bewilderment; and he raised his hand that the silence might be preserved. "The Bastille has fallen? How? What is it?"

"It was captured on Tuesday by the mob of Paris," Louis answered distinctly, his eyes bright, "and M. de Launay, the Governor, murdered in cold blood."

"The Bastille captured? By the mob?" the President exclaimed incredulously. "It is impossible, Monsieur. You must have misunderstood."

Louis shook his head. "It is true, I fear," he said.

"And M. de Launay?"

"That too, I fear, M. le President."

Then, indeed, men looked at one another; startled, pale-faced, asking each mute questions of his fellows; while in the street outside the hum of disorder and rejoicing grew moment by moment more steady and continuous. Men looked at each other alarmed, and could not believe. The Bastille which had stood so many centuries, captured? The Governor killed? Impossible, they muttered, impossible. For what, in that case, was the King doing? What the army? What the Governor of Paris?

Old M. de Gontaut put the thought into words. "But the King?" he said, as soon as he could get a hearing. "Doubtless his Majesty has already punished the wretches?"

The answer came from an unexpected quarter, in words as little expected. M. de St. Alais, to whom Louis had handed a letter, rose from his seat with an open paper in his hand. Doubtless, if he had taken time to consider, he would have seen the imprudence of making public all he knew; but the surprise and mortification of the news he had received-news that gave the lie to his confident assurances, news that made the most certain doubt the ground on which they stood, swept away his discretion. He spoke.

"I do not know what the King was doing," he said, in mocking accents, "at Versailles; but I can tell you how the army was employed in Paris. The Garde Française were foremost in the attack. Besenval, with such troops as have not deserted, has withdrawn. The city is in the hands of the mob. They have shot Flesselles, the Provost, and elected Bailly, Mayor. They have raised a Militia and armed it. They have appointed Lafayette, General. They have adopted a badge. They have-"

"But, *mon Dieu!*" the President cried aghast. "This is a revolt!"

"Precisely, Monsieur," St. Alais answered.

"And what does the King?"

"He is so good-that he has done nothing," was the bitter answer.

"And the States General? – the National Assembly at Versailles?"

"Oh, they? They too have done nothing."

"It is Paris, then?" the President said.

"Yes, Monsieur, it is Paris," the Marquis answered. "But Paris?" the President exclaimed helplessly. "Paris has been quiet so many years."

To this, however, the thought in every one's mind, there seemed to be no answer. St. Alais sat down again, and, for a moment, the Assembly remained stunned by astonishment, prostrate under these new, these marvellous facts. No better comment on the discussions in which it had been engaged a few minutes before could have been found. Its Members had been dreaming of their rights, their privileges, their exemptions; they awoke to find Paris in flames, the army in revolt, order and law in the utmost peril.

But St. Alais was not the man to be long wanting to his part, nor one to abdicate of his free will a leadership which vigour and audacity had secured for him. He sprang to his feet again, and in an impassioned harangue called upon the Assembly to remember the Fronde.

"As Paris was then, Paris is now!" he cried. "Fickle and seditious, to be won by no gifts, but always to be overcome by famine. Best assured that the fat bourgeois will not long do without the white bread of Gonesse, nor the tippler without the white wine of Arbois! Cut these off, the mad will grow sane, and the traitor loyal. Their National Guards, and their Badges, and their Mayors, and their General? Do you think that these will long avail against the forces of order, of loyalty, against the King, the nobility, the clergy, against France? No, gentlemen, it is impossible," he continued, looking round him with warmth. "Paris would have deposed the great Henry and exiled Mazarin; but in the result it licked their shoes. It will be so again, only we must stand together, we must be firm. We must see that these disorders spread no farther. It is the King's to govern, and the people's to obey. It has been so, and it will be so to the end!"

His words were not many, but they were timely and vigorous; and they served to reassure the Assembly. All that large majority, which in every gathering of men has no more imagination than serves to paint the future in the colours of the past, found his arguments perfectly convincing; while the few who saw more clearly, and by the light of instinct, or cold reason, discerned that the state of France had no precedent in its history, felt, nevertheless, the infection of his confidence. A universal shout of applause greeted his last sentence, and, amid tumultuous cries, the concourse, which had remained on its feet, poured into the gangways, and made for the door; a desire to see and hear what was going forward moving all to get out as quickly as possible, though it was not likely that more could be learned than was already known.

I shared this feeling myself, and, forgetting in the excitement of the moment my part in the day's debate, I pressed to the door. The Bastille fallen? The Governor killed? Paris in the hands of the mob? Such tidings were enough to set the brain in a whirl, and breed forgetfulness of nearer matters. Others, in the preoccupation of the moment, seemed to be equally oblivious, and I forced my way out with the rest.

But in the doorway I happened, by a little clumsiness, to touch one of the Harincourts. He turned his head, saw who it was had touched him, and tried to stop. The pressure was too great, however, and he was borne on in front of me, struggling and muttering something I could not hear. I guessed what it was, however, by the manner in which others, abreast of him, and as helpless, turned their heads and sneered at me; and I was considering how I could best encounter what was to come, when the sight which met our gaze, as we at last issued from the narrow passage and faced the market-place-two steps below us-drove their existence for a moment from my mind.

CHAPTER IV. L'AMI DU PEUPLE

There were others who stood also; impressed by a sight which, in the light of the news we had just heard, that astonishing, that amazing news, seemed to have especial significance. We had not yet grown accustomed in France to crowds. For centuries the one man, the individual, King, Cardinal, Noble, or Bishop, had stood forward, and the many, the multitude, had melted away under his eye; had bowed and passed.

But here, within our view, rose the cold lowering dawn of a new day. Perhaps, if we had not heard what we had heard-that news, I mean-or if the people had not heard it, the effect on us, the action on their part, might have been different. As it was, the crowd that faced us in the Square as we came out, the great crowd that faced us and stretched from wall to wall, silent, vigilant, menacing, showed not a sign of flinching; and we did. We stood astonished, each halting as he came out, and looking, and then consulting his neighbour's eyes to learn what he thought.

We had over our heads the great Cathedral, from the shadow of which we issued. We had among us many who had been wont to see a hundred peasants tremble at their frown. But in a moment, in a twinkling, as if that news from Paris had shaken the foundations of Society, we found these things in question. The crowd in the Square did not tremble. In a silence that was grimmer than howling it gave back look for look. Nor only that; but as we issued, they made no way for us, and those of the Assembly who had already gone down, had to walk along the skirts of the press to get to the inn. We who came later saw this, and it had its weight with us. We were Nobles of the province; but we were only two hundred, and between us and the Trois Rois, between us and our horses and servants, stretched this line of gloomy faces, these thousands of silent men.

No wonder that the sight, and something that underlay the sight, diverted my mind for a moment from M. Harincourt and his purpose, and that I looked abroad; while he, too, stood gaping and frowning, and forgot me. Perforce we had to go down; one by one reluctantly, a meagre string winding across the face of the crowd; sullen defiance on one side, scorn on the other. In Cahors it came to be remembered as the first triumph of the people, the first step in the degradation of the privileged. A word had brought it about. A word, *the Bastille fallen*, had combined the floating groups, and formed of them this which we saw-the people.

Under such circumstances it needed only the slightest spark to bring about an explosion; and that was presently supplied. M. de Gontaut, a tall, thin, old man, who could remember the early days of the late King, walked a little way in front of me. He was lame, and used a cane, and as a rule a servant's arm. This morning, the lackey was not forthcoming, and he felt the inconvenience of skirting instead of crossing the square. Nevertheless he was not foolish enough to thrust himself into the crowd; and all might have gone well, if a rogue in the front rank of the throng had not, perhaps by accident, tripped up the cane with his foot. M. le Baron turned in a flash, every hair of his eyebrows on end, and struck the fellow with his stick.

"Stand back, rascal!" he cried, trembling, and threatening to repeat the blow. "If I had you, I would soon-"

The man spat at him.

M. de Gontaut uttered an oath, and in ungovernable rage struck the wretch two or three blows-how many I could not see, though I was only a few paces behind. Apparently the man did not strike back, but shrank, cowed by the old noble's fury. But those behind flung him forward, with cries of "Shame! *A bas la Noblesse!*" and he fell against M. de Gontaut. In a moment the Baron was on the ground.

It was so quickly done that only those in the immediate neighbourhood, St. Alais, the Harincourts, and myself, saw the fall. Probably the mob meant no great harm; they had not yet lost all reverence. But at the time, with the tale of De Launay in my ears, and my imagination inflamed, I thought that they intended M. de Gontaut's death, and as I saw his old head fall, I sprang forward to protect him.

St. Alais was before me, however. Bounding forward, with rage not less than Gontaut's, he hurled the aggressor back with a blow which sent him into the arms of his supporters. Then dragging M. de Gontaut to his feet, the Marquis whipped out his sword, and darting the bright point hither and thither with the skill of a practised fencer, in a twinkling he cleared a space round him, and made the nearest give back with shrieks and curses.

Unfortunately he touched one man; the fellow was not hurt, but at the prick he sank down screaming, and in a second the mood of the crowd changed. Shrieks, half-playful, gave way to a howl of rage. Some one flung a stick, which struck the Marquis on the chest, and for a moment stopped him. The next instant he sprang at the man who had thrown it, and would have run him through, but the fellow fled, and the crowd, with a yell of triumph, closed over his path. This stopped St. Alais in mid course, and left him only the choice between retreating, or wounding people who were innocent.

He fell back with a sneering word, and sheathed his sword. But the moment his back was turned a stone struck him on the head, and he staggered forward. As he fell the crowd uttered a yell, and half a dozen men dashed at him to trample on him.

Their blood was up; this time I made no mistake, I read mischief in their eyes. The scream of the man whom he had wounded, though the fellow was more frightened than hurt, was in their ears. One of the Harincourts struck down the foremost, but this only enraged without checking them. In a moment he was swept aside and flung back, stunned and reeling; and the crowd rushed upon their victim.

I threw myself before him. I had just time to do that, and cry "Shame! shame!" and force back one or two; and then my intervention must have come to nothing, it must have fared as ill with me as with him, if in the nick of time, with a ring of grimy faces threatening us, and a dozen hands upraised, I had not been recognised. Buton, the blacksmith of Saux-one of the foremost-screamed out my name, and turning with outstretched arms, forced back his neighbours. A man of huge strength, it was as much as he could do to stem the torrent; but in a moment his frenzied cries became heard and understood. Others recognised me, the crowd fell back. Some one raised a cry of "*Vive Saux!* Long live the friend of the people!" and the shout being taken up first in one place and then in another, in a trice the Square rang with the words.

I had not then learned the fickleness of the multitude, or that from *A bas* to *vive* is the step of an instant; and despite myself, and though I despised myself for the feeling, I felt my heart swell on the wave of sound. "*Vive Saux! Vive l'ami du peuple!*" My equals had scorned me, but the people-the people whose faces wore a new look to-day, the people to whom this one word, the Bastille fallen, had given new life-acclaimed me. For a moment, even while I cried to them, and shook my hands to them to be silent, there flashed on me the things it meant; the things they had to give, power and tribuneship! "*Vive Saux!* long live the friend of the people!" The air shook with the sound; the domes above me gave it back. I felt myself lifted up on it; I felt myself for the minute another and a greater man!

Then I turned and met St. Alais' eye, and I fell to earth. He had risen, and, pale with rage, was wiping the dust from his coat with a handkerchief. A little blood was flowing from the wound in his head, but he paid no heed to it, in the intentness with which he was staring at me, as if he read my thoughts. As soon as something like silence was obtained, he spoke.

"Perhaps if your friends have quite done with us, M. de Saux-we may go home?" he said, his voice trembling a little.

I stammered something in answer to the sneer, and turned to accompany him; though my way to the inn lay in the opposite direction. Only the two Harincourts and M. de Gontaut were with us.

The rest of the Assembly had either got clear, or were viewing the fracas from the door of the Chapter House, where they stood, cut off from us by a wall of people. I offered my arm to M. de Gontaut, but he declined it with a frigid bow, and took Harincourt's; and M. le Marquis, when I turned to him, said, with a cold smile, that they need not trouble me.

"Doubtless we shall be safe," he sneered, "if you will give orders to that effect."

I bowed, without retorting on him; he bowed; and he turned away. But the crowd had either read his attitude aright, or gathered that there was an altercation between us, for the moment he moved they set up a howl. Two or three stones were thrown, notwithstanding Buton's efforts to prevent it; and before the party had retired ten yards the rabble began to press on them savagely. Embarrassed by M. de Gontaut's presence and helplessness, the other three could do nothing. For an instant I had a view of St. Alais standing gallantly at bay with the old noble behind him, and the blood trickling down his cheek. Then I followed them, the crowd made instant way for me, again the air rang with cheers, and the Square in the hot July sunshine seemed a sea of waving hands.

M. de St. Alais turned to me. He could still smile, and with marvellous self-command, in one and the same instant he recovered from his discomfiture and changed his tactics.

"I am afraid that after all we must trouble you," he said politely. "M. le Baron is not a young man, and your people, M. de Saux, are somewhat obstreperous."

"What can I do?" I said sullenly. I had not the heart to leave them to their fortunes; at the same time I was as little disposed to accept the onus he would lay on me.

"Accompany us home," he said pleasantly, drawing out his snuff-box and taking a pinch.

The people had fallen silent again, but watched us heedfully. "If you think it will serve?" I answered.

"It will," he said briskly. "You know, M. le Vicomte, that a man is born and a man dies every minute? Believe me no King dies-but another King is born."

I winced under the sarcasm, under the laughing contempt of his eye. Yet I saw nothing for it but to comply, and I bowed and turned to go with them. The crowd opened before us; amid mingled cheers and yells we moved away. I intended only to accompany them to the outskirts of the throng, and then to gain the inn by a by-path, get my horses and be gone. But a party of the crowd continued to follow us through the streets, and I found no opportunity. Almost before I knew it, we were at the St. Alais' door, still with this rough attendance at our heels.

Madame and Mademoiselle, with two or three women, were on the balcony, looking and listening; at the door below stood a group of scared servants. While I looked, however, Madame left her place above and in a moment appeared at the door, the servants making way for her. She stared in wonder at us, and from us to the rabble that followed; then her eye caught the bloodstains on M. de St. Alais' cravat, and she cried out to know if he was hurt.

"No, Madame," he said lightly. "But M. de Gontaut has had a fall."

"What has happened?" she asked quickly. "The town seems to have gone mad! I heard a great noise a while ago, and the servants brought in a wild tale about the Bastille."

"It is true."

"What? That the Bastille-"

"Has been taken by the mob, Madame; and M. de Launay murdered."

"Impossible!" Madame cried with flashing eyes. "That old man?"

"Yes," M. de St. Alais answered with treacherous suavity. "Messieurs the Mob are no respecters of persons. Fortunately, however," he went on, smiling at me in a way that brought the blood to my cheeks, "they have leaders more prudent and sagacious than themselves."

But Madame had no ears for his last words, no thought save of this astonishing news from Paris. She stood, her cheeks on fire, her eyes full of tears; she had known De Launay. "Oh, but the King will punish them!" she cried at last. "The wretches! The ingrates! They should all be broken on the wheel! Doubtless the King has already punished them."

"He will, by-and-by, if he has not yet," St. Alais answered. "But for the moment, you will easily understand, Madame, that things are out of joint. Men's heads are turned, and they do not know themselves. We have had a little trouble here. M. de Gontaut has been roughly handled, and I have not entirely escaped. If M. de Saux had not had his people well in hand," he continued, turning to me with a laughing eye, "I am afraid that we should have come off worse."

Madame stared at me, and, beginning slowly to comprehend, seemed to freeze before me. The light died out of her haughty face. She looked at me grimly. I had a glimpse of Mademoiselle's startled eyes behind her, and of the peeping servants; then Madame spoke. "Are these some of-M. de Saux's people?" she asked, stepping forward a pace, and pointing to the crew of ruffians who had halted a few paces away, and were watching us doubtfully.

"A handful," M. de St. Alais answered lightly. "Just his bodyguard, Madame. But pray do not speak of him so harshly; for, being my mother, you must be obliged to him. If he did not quite save my life, at least he saved my beauty."

"With those?" she said scornfully.

"With those or from those," he answered gaily. "Besides, for a day or two we may need his protection. I am sure that, if you ask him, Madame, he will not refuse it."

I stood, raging and helpless, under the lash of his tongue; and Madame de St. Alais looked at me. "Is it possible," she said at last, "that M. de Saux has thrown in his lot with wretches such as those?" And she pointed with magnificent scorn to the scowling crew behind me. "With wretches who-"

"Hush, Madame," M. le Marquis said in his gibing fashion. "You are too bold. For the moment they are our masters, and M. de Saux is theirs. We must, therefore-"

"We must not!" she answered impetuously, raising herself to her full height and speaking with flashing eyes. "What? Would you have me palter with the scum of the streets? With the dirt under our feet? With the sweepings of the gutter? Never! I and mine have no part with traitors!"

"Madame!" I cried, stung to speech by her injustice. "You do not know what you say! If I have been able to stand between your son and danger, it has been through no vileness such as you impute to me."

"Impute?" she exclaimed. "What need of imputation, Monsieur, with those wretches behind you? Is it necessary to cry '*A bas le roi!*' to be a traitor? Is not that man as guilty who fosters false hopes, and misleads the ignorant? Who hints what he dare not say, and holds out what he dares not promise? Is he not the worst of traitors? For shame, Monsieur, for shame!" she continued. "If your father-"

"Oh!" I cried. "This is intolerable!"

She caught me up with a bitter gibe. "It is!" she retorted. "It *is* intolerable-that the King's fortresses should be taken by the rabble, and old men slain by scullions! It is intolerable that nobles should forget whence they are sprung, and stoop to the kennel! It is intolerable that the King's name should be flouted, and catchwords set above it! All these things are intolerable; but they are not of our doing. They are your acts. And for you," she continued-and suddenly stepping by me, she addressed the group of rascals who lingered, listening and scowling, a few paces away-"for you, poor fools, do not be deceived. This gentleman has told you, doubtless, that there is no longer a King of France! That there are to be no more taxes nor *corvées*; that the poor will be rich, and everybody noble! Well, believe him if you please. There have been poor and rich, noble and simple, spenders and makers, since the world began, and a King in France. But believe him if you please. Only now go! Leave my house. Go, or I will call out my servants, and whip you through the streets like dogs! To your kennels, I say!"

She stamped her foot, and to my astonishment, the men, who must have known that her threat was an empty one, sneaked away like the dogs to which she had compared them. In a moment-I could scarcely believe it-the street was empty. The men who had come near to killing M. de Gontaut, who had stoned M. de St. Alais, quailed before a woman! In a twinkling the last man was gone, and she turned to me, her face flushed, her eyes gleaming with scorn.

"There, sir," she said, "take that lesson to heart. That is your brave people! And now, Monsieur, do you go too! Henceforth my house is no place for you. I will have no traitors under my roof-no, not for a moment."

She signed to me to go with the same insolent contempt which had abashed the crowd; but before I went I said one word. "You were my father's friend, Madame," I said before them all.

She looked at me harshly, but did not answer.

"It would have better become you, therefore," I continued, "to help me than to hurt me. As it is, were I the most loyal of his Majesty's subjects, you have done enough to drive me to treason. In the future, Madame la Marquise, I beg that you will remember that."

And I turned and went, trembling with rage.

The crowd in the Square had melted by this time, but the streets were full of those who had composed it; who now stood about in eager groups, discussing what had happened. The word Bastille was on every tongue; and, as I passed, way was made for me, and caps were lifted. "God bless you, M. de Saux," and, "You are a good man," were muttered in my ear. If there seemed to be less noise and less excitement than in the morning, the air of purpose that everywhere prevailed was not to be mistaken.

This was so clear that, though noon was barely past, shopkeepers had closed their shops and bakers their bakehouses; and a calm, more ominous than the storm that had preceded it, brooded over the town. The majority of the Assembly had dispersed in haste, for I saw none of the Members, though I heard that a large body had gone to the barracks. No one molested me-the fall of the Bastille served me so far-and I mounted, and rode out of town, without seeing any one, even Louis.

To tell the truth, I was in a fever to be at home; in a fever to consult the only man who, it seemed to me, could advise me in this crisis. In front of me, I saw it plainly, stretched two roads; the one easy and smooth, if perilous, the other arid and toilsome. Madame had called me the Tribune of the People, a would-be Retz, a would-be Mirabeau. The people had cried my name, had hailed me as a saviour. Should I fit on the cap? Should I take up the *rôle?* My own caste had spurned me. Should I snatch at the dangerous honour offered to me, and stand or fall with the people?

With the people? It sounded well, but, in those days, it was a vaguer phrase than it is now; and I asked myself who, that had ever taken up that cause, had stood? A bread riot, a tumult, a local revolt-such as this which had cost M. de Launay his life-of things of that size the people had shown themselves capable; but of no lasting victory. Always the King had held his own, always the nobles had kept their privileges. Why should it be otherwise now?

There were reasons. Yes, truly; but they seemed less cogent, the weight of precedent against them heavier, when I came to think, with a trembling heart, of acting on them. And the odium of deserting my order was no small matter to face. Hitherto I had been innocent; if they had put out the lip at me, they had done it wrongfully. But if I accepted this part, the part they assigned to me, I must be prepared to face not only the worst in case of failure, but in success to be a pariah. To be Tribune of the People, and an outcast from my kind!

I rode hard to keep pace with these thoughts; and I did not doubt that I should be the first to bring the tale to Saux. But in those days nothing was more marvellous than the speed with which news of this kind crossed the country. It passed from mouth to mouth, from eye to eye; the air seemed to carry it. It went before the quickest traveller.

Everywhere, therefore, I found it known. Known by people who had stood for days at cross-roads, waiting for they knew not what; known by scowling men on village bridges, who talked in low voices and eyed the towers of the Château; known by stewards and agents, men of the stamp of Gargouf, who smiled incredulously, or talked, like Madame St. Alais, of the King, and how good he was, and how many he would hang for it. Known, last of all, by Father Benôit, the man I would consult. He met me at the gate of the Château, opposite the place where the *carcan* had stood. It was too dark to see his face, but I knew the fall of his *soutane* and the shape of his hat. I sent on Gil and André, and he walked beside me up the avenue, with his hand on the withers of my horse.

"Well, M. le Vicomte, it has come at last," he said.

"You have heard?"

"Buton told me."

"What? Is he here?" I said in surprise. "I saw him at Cahors less than three hours ago."

"Such news gives a man wings," Father Benôit answered with energy. "I say again, it has come. It has come, M. le Vicomte."

"Something," I said prudently.

"Everything," he answered confidently. "The mob took the Bastille, but who headed them? The soldiers; the Garde Française. Well, M. le Vicomte, if the army cannot be trusted, there is an end of abuses, an end of exemptions, of extortions, of bread famines, of Foulons and Berthiers, of grinding the faces of the poor, of-"

The Curé's list was not half exhausted when I cut it short. "But if the army is with the mob, where will things stop?" I said wearily.

"We must see to that," he answered.

"Come and sup with me," I said, "I have something to tell you, and more to ask you."

He assented gladly. "For there will be no sleep for me to-night," he said, his eye sparkling. "This is great news, glorious news, M. le Vicomte. Your father would have heard it with joy."

"And M. de Launay?" I said as I dismounted.

"There can be no change without suffering," he answered stoutly, though his face fell a little. "His fathers sinned, and he has paid the penalty. But God rest his soul! I have heard that he was a good man."

"And died in his duty," I said rather tartly.

"Amen," Father Benôit answered.

Yet it was not until we were sat down in the Chestnut Parlour (which the servants called the English Room), and, with candles between us, were busy with our cheese and fruit, that I appreciated to the full the impression which the news had made on the Curé. Then, as he talked, as he told and listened, his long limbs and lean form trembled with excitement; his thin face worked. "It is the end," he said. "You may depend upon it, M. le Vicomte, it is the end. Your father told me many times that in money lay the secret of power. Money, he used to say, pays the army, the army secures all. A while ago the money failed. Now the army fails. There is nothing left."

"The King?" I said, unconsciously quoting Madame la Marquise.

"God bless his Majesty!" the Curé answered heartily. "He means well, and now he will be able to do well, because the nation will be with him. But without the nation, without money or an army-a name only. And the name did not save the Bastille."

Then, beginning with the scene at Madame de St. Alais' reception, I told him all that had happened to me; the oath of the sword, the debate in the Assembly, the tumult in the Square-last of all, the harsh words with which Madame had given me my *congé*; all. As he listened he was extraordinarily moved. When I described the scene in the Chamber, he could not be still, but in his enthusiasm, walked about the parlour, muttering. And, when I told him how the crowd had cried "*Vive Saux!*" he repeated the words softly and looked at me with delighted eyes. But when I came-halting somewhat in my speech, and colouring and playing with my bread to hide my disorder-to tell him my thoughts on the way home, and the choice that, as it seemed to me, was offered to me, he sat down, and fell also to crumbling his bread and was silent.

CHAPTER V.
THE DEPUTATION

He sat silent so long, with his eyes on the table, that presently I grew nettled; wondering what ailed him, and why he did not speak and say the things that I expected. I had been so confident of the advice he would give me, that, from the first, I had tinged my story with the appropriate colour. I had let my bitterness be seen; I had suppressed no scornful word, but supplied him with all the ground he could desire for giving me the advice I supposed to be upon his lips.

And yet he did not speak. A hundred times I had heard him declare his sympathy with the people, his hatred of the corruption, the selfishness, the abuses of the Government; within the hour I had seen his eye kindle as he spoke of the fall of the Bastille. It was at his word I had burned the *carcan*; at his instance I had spent a large sum in feeding the village during the famine of the past year. Yet now-now, when I expected him to rise up and bid me do my part, he was silent!

I had to speak at last. "Well?" I said irritably. "Have you nothing to say, M. le Curé?" And I moved one of the candles so as to get a better view of his features. But he still looked down at the table, he still avoided my eye, his thin face thoughtful, his hand toying with the crumbs.

At last, "M. le Vicomte," he said softly, "through my mother's mother I, too, am noble."

I gasped; not at the fact with which I was familiar, but at the application I thought he intended. "And for that," I said amazed, "you would-"

He raised his hand to stop me. "No," he said gently, "I would not. Because, for all that, I am of the people by birth, and of the poor by my calling. But-"

"But what?" I said peevishly.

Instead of answering me he rose from his seat, and, taking up one of the candles, turned to the panelled wall behind him, on which hung a full-length portrait of my father, framed in a curious border of carved foliage. He read the name below it. "Antoine du Pont, Vicomte de Saux," he said, as if to himself. "He was a good man, and a friend to the poor. God keep him."

He lingered a moment, gazing at the grave, handsome face, and doubtless recalling many things; then he passed, holding the candle aloft, to another picture which flanked the table: each wall boasted one. "Adrien du Pont, Vicomte de Saux," he read, "Colonel of the Regiment Flamande. He was killed, I think, at Minden. Knight of St. Louis and of the King's Bedchamber. A handsome man, and doubtless a gallant gentleman. I never knew him."

I answered nothing, but my face began to burn as he passed to a third picture behind me. "Antoine du Pont, Vicomte de Saux," he read, holding up the candle, "Marshal and Peer of France, Knight of the King's Orders, a Colonel of the Household and of the King's Council. Died of the plague at Genoa in 1710. I think I have heard that he married a Rohan."

He looked long, then passed to the fourth wall, and stood a moment quite silent. "And this one?" he said at last. "He, I think, has the noblest face of all. Antoine, Seigneur du Pont de Saux, of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Preceptor of the French tongue. Died at Valetta in the year after the Great Siege-of his wounds, some say; of incredible labours and exertions, say the Order. A Christian soldier."

It was the last picture, and, after gazing at it a moment, he brought the candle back and set it down with its two fellows on the shining table; that, with the panelled walls, swallowed up the light, and left only our faces white and bright, with a halo round them, and darkness behind them. He bowed to me. "M. le Vicomte," he said at last, in a voice which shook a little, "you come of a noble stock."

I shrugged my shoulders. "It is known," I said. "And for that?"

"I dare not advise you."

"But the cause is good!" I cried.

"Yes," he answered slowly. "I have been saying so all my life. I dare not say otherwise now. But-the cause of the people is the people's. Leave it to the people."

"*You* say that!" I answered, staring at him, angry and perplexed. "You, who have told me a hundred times that I am of the people! that the nobility are of the people; that there are only two things in France, the King and the people."

He smiled somewhat sadly; tapping on the table with his fingers. "That was theory," he said. "I try to put it into practice, and my heart fails me. Because I, too, have a little nobility, M. le Vicomte, and know what it is."

"I don't understand you," I said in despair. "You blow hot and cold, M. le Curé. I told you just now that I spoke for the people at the meeting of the noblesse, and you approved."

"It was nobly done."

"Yet now?"

"I say the same thing," Father Benôit answered, his fine face illumined with feeling. "It was nobly done. Fight for the people, M. le Vicomte, but among your fellows. Let your voice be heard there, where all you will gain for yourself will be obloquy and black looks. But if it comes, if it has come, to a struggle between your class and the commons, between the nobility and the vulgar; if the noble must side with his fellows or take the people's pay, then" – Father Benôit's voice trembled a little, and his thin white hand tapped softly on the table-"I would rather see you ranked with your kind."

"Against the people?"

"Yes, against the people," he answered, shrinking a little.

I was astonished. "Why, great heaven," I said, "the smallest logic-"

"Ah!" he answered, shaking his head sadly, and looking at me with kind eyes. "There you beat me; logic is against me. Reason, too. The cause of the people, the cause of reform, of honesty, of cheap grain, of equal justice, *must* be a good one. And who forwards it must be in the right. That is so, M. le Vicomte. Nay, more than that. If the people are left to fight their battle alone the danger of excesses is greater. I see that. But instinct does not let me act on the knowledge."

"Yet, M. de Mirabeau?" I said. "I have heard you call him a great man."

"It is true," Father Benôit answered, keeping his eyes on mine, while he drummed softly on the table with his fingers.

"I have heard you speak of him with admiration."

"Often."

"And of M. de Lafayette?"

"Yes."

"And the Lameths?"

M. le Curé nodded.

"Yet all these," I said stubbornly, "all these are nobles-nobles leading the people!"

"Yes," he said.

"And you do not blame them?"

"No, I do not blame them."

"Nay, you admire them! You admire them, Father," I persisted, glowering at him.

"I know I do," he said. "I know that I am weak and a fool. Perhaps worse, M. le Vicomte, in that I have not the courage of my convictions. But, though I admire those men, though I think them great and to be admired, I have heard men speak of them who thought otherwise; and-it may be weak-but I knew you as a boy, and I would not have men speak so of you. There are things we admire at a distance," he continued, looking at me a little drolly, to hide the affection that shone in his eyes, "which we, nevertheless, do not desire to find in those we love. Odium heaped on a stranger is nothing to us; on our friends, it were worse than death."

He stopped, his voice trembling; and we were both silent for a while. Still, I would not let him see how much his words had touched me; and by-and-by-

"But my father?" I said. "He was strongly on the side of reform!"

"Yes, by the nobles, for the people."

"But the nobles have cast me out!" I answered. "Because I have gone a yard, I have lost all. Shall I not go two, and win all back?"

"Win all," he said softly-"but lose how much?"

"Yet if the people win? And you say they will?"

"Even then, Tribune of the People," he answered gently, "and an outcast!"

They were the very words I had applied to myself as I rode; and I started. With sudden vividness I saw the picture they presented; and I understood why Father Benôit had hesitated so long in my case. With the purest intentions and the most upright heart, I could not make myself other than what I was; I should rise, were my efforts crowned with success, to a point of splendid isolation; suspected by the people, whose benefactor I had been, hated and cursed by the nobles whom I had deserted.

Such a prospect would have been far from deterring some; and others it might have lured. But I found myself, in this moment of clear vision, no hero. Old prejudices stirred in the blood, old traditions, born of centuries of precedence and privilege, awoke in the memory. A shiver of doubt and mistrust-such as, I suppose, has tormented reformers from the first, and caused all but the hardiest to flinch-passed through me, as I gazed across the candles at the Curé. I feared the people-the unknown. The howl of exultation, that had rent the air in the Market-place at Cahors, the brutal cries that had hailed Gontaut's fall, rang again in my ears. I shrank back, as a man shrinks who finds himself on the brink of an abyss, and through the wavering mist, parted for a brief instant by the wind, sees the cruel rocks and jagged points that wait for him below.

It was a moment of extraordinary prevision, and though it passed, and speedily left me conscious once more of the silent room and the good Curé-who affected to be snuffing one of the long candles-the effect it produced on my mind continued. After Father Benôit had taken his leave, and the house was closed, I walked for an hour up and down the walnut avenue; now standing to gaze between the open iron gates that gave upon the road; now turning my back on them, and staring at the grey, gaunt, steep-roofed house with its flanking tower and round *tourelles.*

Henceforth, I made up my mind, I would stand aside. I would welcome reform, I would do in private what I could to forward it; but I would not a second time set myself against my fellows. I had had the courage of my opinions. Henceforth, no man could say that I had hidden them, but after this I would stand aside and watch the course of events.

A cock crowed at the rear of the house-untimely; and across the hushed fields, through the dusk, came the barking of a distant dog. As I stood listening, while the solemn stars gazed down, the slight which St. Alais had put upon me dwindled-dwindled to its true dimensions. I thought of Mademoiselle Denise, of the bride I had lost, with a faint regret that was almost amusement. What would she think of this sudden rupture? I wondered. Of this strange loss of her *fiancé?* Would it awaken her curiosity, her interest? Or would she, fresh from her convent school, think that things in the world went commonly so-that *fiancés* came and passed, and receptions found their natural end in riot?

I laughed softly, pleased that I had made up my mind. But, had I known, as I listened to the rustling of the poplars in the road, and the sounds that came out of the darkened world beyond them, what was passing there-had I known that, I should have felt even greater satisfaction. For this was Wednesday, the 22nd of July; and that night Paris still palpitated after viewing strange things. For the first time she had heard the horrid cry, "*A la lanterne!*" and seen a man, old and white-headed, hanged, and tortured, until death freed him. She had seen another, the very Intendant of the City, flung down, trampled and torn to pieces in his own streets-publicly, in full day, in the presence of thousands. She had seen these things, trembling; and other things also-things that had made the cheeks of reformers grow pale, and betrayed to all thinking men that below Lafayette, below Bailly, below the Municipality and the Electoral Committee, roared and seethed the awakened forces of the Faubourgs, of St. Antoine, and St. Marceau!

What could be expected, what was to be expected, but that such outrages, remaining unpunished, should spread? Within a week the provinces followed the lead of Paris. Already, on the 21st the mob of Strasbourg had sacked the Hôtel de Ville and destroyed the Archives; and during the same week, the Bastilles at Bordeaux and Caen were taken and destroyed. At Rouen, at Rennes, at Lyons, at St. Malo, were great riots, with fighting; and nearer Paris, at Poissy, and St. Germain, the populace hung the millers. But, as far as Cahors was concerned, it was not until the astonishing tidings of the King's surrender reached us, a few days later-tidings that on the 17th of July he had entered insurgent Paris, and tamely acquiesced in the destruction of the Bastille-it was not until that news reached us, and hard on its heels a rumour of the second rising on the 22nd, and the slaughter of Foulon and Berthier-it was not until then, I say, that the country round us began to be moved. Father Benôit, with a face of astonishment and doubt, brought me the tidings, and we walked on the terrace discussing it. Probably reports, containing more or less of the truth, had reached the city before, and, giving men something else to think of, had saved me from challenge or molestation. But, in the country where I had spent the week in moody unrest, and not unfrequently reversing in the morning the decision at which I had arrived in the night, I had heard nothing until the Curé came-I think on the morning of the 29th of July.

"And what do you think now?" I said thoughtfully, when I had listened to his tale.

"Only what I did before," he answered stoutly. "It has come. Without money, and therefore without soldiers who will fight, with a starving people, with men's minds full of theories and abstractions, that all tend towards change, what can a Government do?"

"Apparently it can cease to govern," I said tartly; "and that is not what any one wants."

"There must be a period of unrest," he replied, but less confidently. "The forces of order, however, the forces of the law have always triumphed. I don't doubt that they will again."

"After a period of unrest?"

"Yes," he answered. "After a period of unrest. And, I confess, I wish that we were through that. But we must be of good heart, M. le Vicomte. We must trust the people; we must confide in their good sense, their capacity for government, their moderation-"

I had to interrupt him. "What is it, Gil?" I said with a gesture of apology. The servant had come out of the house and was waiting to speak to me.

"M. Doury, M. le Vicomte, from Cahors," he answered.

"The inn-keeper?"

"Yes, Monsieur; and Buton. They ask to see you."

"Together?" I said. It seemed a strange conjunction.

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Well, show them here," answered, after consulting my companion's face. "But Doury? I paid my bill. What can he want?"

"We shall see," Father Benôit answered, his eyes on the door. "Here they come. Ah! Now, M. le Vicomte," he continued in a lower tone, "I feel less confident."

I suppose he guessed something akin to the truth; but for my part I was completely at a loss. The innkeeper, a sleek, complaisant man, of whom, though I had known him some years, I had never seen much beyond the crown of his head, nor ever thought of him as apart from his guests and his ordinary, wore, as he advanced, a strange motley of dignity and subservience; now strutting with pursed lips, and an air of extreme importance, and now stooping to bow in a shame-faced and half-hearted manner. His costume was as great a surprise as his appearance, for, instead of his citizen's suit of black, he sported a blue coat with gold buttons, and a canary waistcoat, and he carried a gold-headed cane; sober splendours, which, nevertheless, paled before two large bunches of ribbons, white, red, and blue, which he wore, one on his breast, and one in his hat.

His companion, who followed a foot or two behind, his giant frame and sun-burned face setting off the citizen's plumpness, was similarly bedizened. But though be-ribboned and in strange company, he was still Baton, the smith. His face reddened as he met my eyes, and he shielded himself as well as he could behind Doury's form.

"Good-morning, Doury," I said. I could have laughed at the awkward complaisance of the man's manner, if something in the gravity of the Curé's face had not restrained me. "What brings you to Saux?" I continued. "And what can I do for you?"

"If it please you, M. le Vicomte," he began. Then he paused, and straightening himself-for habit had bent his back-he continued abruptly, "Public business, Monsieur, with you on it."

"With me?' I said, amazed. On public business?"

He smiled in a sickly way, but stuck to his text. "Even so, Monsieur," he said. "There are such great changes, and-and so great need of advice."

"That I ought not to wonder at M. Doury seeking it at Saux?"

"Even so, Monsieur."

I did not try to hide my contempt and amusement; but shrugged my shoulders, and looked at the Curé.

"Well," I said, after a moment of silence, "and what is it? Have you been selling bad wine? Or do you want the number of courses limited by Act of the States General? Or-"

"Monsieur," he said, drawing himself up with an attempt at dignity, "this is no time for jesting. In the present crisis inn-keepers have as much at stake as, with reverence, the noblesse; and deserted by those who should lead them-"

"What, the inn-keepers?" I cried.

He grew as red as a beetroot. "M. le Vicomte understands that I mean the people," he said stiffly. "Who deserted, I say, by their natural leaders-"

"For instance?"

"M. le Duc d'Artois, M. le Prince de Condé, M. le Duc de Polignac, M. – "

"Bah!" I said. "How have they deserted?"

"*Pardieu*, Monsieur! Have you not heard?"

"Have I not heard what?"

"That they have left France? That on the night of the 17th, three days after the capture of the Bastille, the princes of the blood left France by stealth, and-"

"Impossible!" I said. "Impossible! Why should they leave?"

"That is the very question, M. le Vicomte," he answered, with eager forwardness, "that is being asked. Some say that they thought to punish Paris by withdrawing from it. Some that they did it to show their disapproval of his most gracious Majesty's amnesty, which was announced on that day. Some that they stand in fear. Some even that they anticipated Foulon's fate-"

"Fool!" I cried, stopping him sternly-for I found this too much for my stomach-"you rave! Go back to your menus and your bouillis! What do you know about State affairs? Why, in my grandfather's time," I continued wrathfully, "if you had spoken of princes of the blood after that fashion, you would have tasted bread and water for six months, and been lucky had you got off unwhipped!"

He quailed before me, and forgetting his new part in old habits, muttered an apology. He had not meant to give offence, he said. He had not understood. Nevertheless, I was preparing to read him a lesson when, to my astonishment, Buton intervened.

"But, Monsieur, that is thirty years back," he said doggedly.

"What, villain?" I exclaimed, almost breathless with astonishment, "what do you in this *galère?*"

"I am with him," he answered, indicating his companion by a sullen gesture.

"On State business?"

"Yes, Monsieur."

"Why, *mon Dieu*," I cried, staring at them between amusement and incredulity, "if this is true, why did you not bring the watch-dog as well! And Farmer Jean's ram? And the good-wife's cat? And M. Doury's turnspit? And-"

M. le Curé touched my arm. "Perhaps you had better hear what they have to say," he observed softly. "Afterwards, M. le Vicomte-"

I nodded sulkily. "What is it, then?" I said. "Ask what you want to ask."

"The Intendant has fled," Doury answered, recovering something of his lost dignity, "and we are forming, in pursuance of advice received from Paris, and following the glorious example of that city, a Committee; a Committee to administer the affairs of the district. From that Committee, I, Monsieur, with my good friend here, have the honour to be a deputation."

"With him?" I said, unable to control myself longer. "But, in heaven's name, what has he to do with the Committee? Or the affairs of the district?"

And I pointed with relentless finger at Buton, who reddened under his tan, and moved his huge feet uneasily, but did not speak.

"He is a member of it," the inn-keeper answered, regarding his colleague with a side glance, which seemed to express anything but liking. "This Committee, to be as perfect as possible, Monsieur le Vicomte will understand, must represent all classes."

"Even mine, I suppose," I said, with a sneer.

"It is on that business we have come," he answered awkwardly. "To ask, in a word, M. le Vicomte, that you will allow yourself to be elected a member, and not only a member-

"What elevation!"

"But President of the Committee."

After all-it was no more than I had been foreseeing! It had come suddenly, but in the main it was only that in sober fact which I had foreseen in a dream. Styled the mandate of the people, it had sounded well; by the mouth of Doury, the inn-keeper, Buton assessor, it jarred every nerve in me. I say, it should not have surprised me; while such things were happening in the world, with a King who stood by and saw his fortress taken, and his servants killed, and pardoned the rebels; with an Intendant of Paris slaughtered in his own streets; with rumours and riots in every province, and flying princes, and swinging millers, there was really nothing wonderful in the invitation. And now, looking back, I find nothing surprising in it. I have lived to see men of the same trade as Doury, stand by the throne, glittering in stars and orders; and a smith born in the forge sit down to dine with Emperors. But that July day on the terrace at Saux, the offer seemed of all farces the wildest, and of all impertinences the most absurd.

"Thanks, Monsieur," I said, at last, when I had sufficiently recovered from my astonishment. "If I understand you rightly, you ask me to sit on the same Committee with that man?" And I pointed grimly to Buton. "With the peasant born on my land, and subject yesterday to my justice? With the serf whom my fathers freed? With the workman living on my wages?"

Doury glanced at his colleague. "Well, M. le Vicomte," he said, with a cough, "to be perfect, you understand, a Committee must represent all."

"A Committee!" I retorted, unable to repress my scorn. "It is a new thing in France. And what is the perfect Committee to do?"

Doury on a sudden recovered himself, and swelled with importance. "The Intendant has fled," he said, "and people no longer trust the magistrates. There are rumours of brigands, too; and corn is required. With all this the Committee must deal. It must take measures to keep the peace, to supply the city, to satisfy the soldiers, to hold meetings, and consider future steps. Besides, M. le Vicomte," he continued, puffing out his cheeks, "it will correspond with Paris; it will administer the law; it will-"

"In a word," I said quietly, "it will govern. The King, I suppose, having abdicated."

Doury shrank bodily, and even lost some of his colour. "God forbid!" he said, in a whining tone. "It will do all in his Majesty's name."

"And by his authority?"

The inn-keeper stared at me, startled and nonplussed; and muttered something about the people.

"Ah!" I said. "It is the people who invite me to govern, then, is it? With an inn-keeper and a peasant? And other inn-keepers and peasants, I suppose? To govern! To usurp his Majesty's functions? To supersede his magistrates; to bribe his forces? In a word, friend Doury," I continued suavely, "to commit treason. Treason, you understand?"

The inn-keeper did; and he wiped his forehead with a shaking hand, and stood, scared and speechless, looking at me piteously. A second time the blacksmith took it on himself to answer.

"Monseigneur," he muttered, drawing his great black hand across his beard.

"Buton," I answered suavely, "permit me. For a man who aspires to govern the country, you are too respectful."

"You have omitted one thing it is for the Committee to do," the smith answered hoarsely, looking-like a timid, yet sullen, dog-anywhere but in my face.

"And that is?"

"To protect the Seigneurs."

I stared at him, between anger and surprise. This was a new light. After a pause, "From whom?" I said curtly.

"Their people," he answered.

"Their Butons," I said. "I see. We are to be burned in our beds, are we?"

He stood sulkily silent.

"Thank you, Buton," I said. "And that is your return for a winter's corn. Thanks! In this world it is profitable to do good!"

The man reddened through his tan, and on a sudden looked at me for the first time. "You know that you lie, M. le Vicomte!" he said.

"Lie, sirrah?" I cried.

"Yes, Monsieur," he answered. "You know that I would die for the seigneur, as much as if the iron collar were round my neck! That before fire touched the house of Saux it should burn me! That I am my lord's man, alive and dead. But, Monseigneur," and, as he continued, he lowered his tone to one of earnestness, striking in a man so rough, "there are abuses, and there must be an end of them. There are tyrants, and they must go. There are men and women and children starving, and there must be an end of that. There is grinding of the faces of the poor, Monseigneur-not here, but everywhere round us-and there must be an end of that. And the poor pay taxes and the rich go free; the poor make the roads, and the rich use them; the poor have no salt, while the King eats gold. To all these things there is now to be an end-quietly, if the seigneurs will-but an end. An end, Monseigneur, though we burn châteaux," he added grimly.

CHAPTER VI.
A MEETING IN THE ROAD

The unlooked-for eloquence which rang in the blacksmith's words, and the assurance of his tone, no less than this startling disclosure of thoughts with which I had never dreamed of crediting him, or any peasant, took me so aback for a moment that I stood silent. Doury seized the occasion, and struck in.

"You see now, M. le Vicomte," he said complacently, "the necessity for such a Committee. The King's peace must be maintained."

"I see," I answered harshly, "that there are violent men abroad, who were better in the stocks. Committee? Let the King's officers keep the King's peace! The proper machinery-"

"It is shattered!"

The words were Doury's. The next moment he quailed at his presumption. "Then let it be repaired!" I thundered. "*Mon Dieu!* that a set of tavern cooks and base-born rascals should go about the country prating of it, and prating to me! Go, I will have nothing to do with you or your Committee. Go, I say!"

"Nevertheless-a little patience, M. le Vicomte," he persisted, chagrin on his pale face-"nevertheless, if any of the nobility would give us countenance, you most of all-"

"There would then be some one to hang instead of Doury!" I answered bluntly. "Some one behind whom he could shield himself, and lesser villains hide. But I will not be the stalking-horse."

"And yet, in other provinces," he answered desperately, his disappointment more and more pronounced, "M. de Liancourt and M. de Rochefoucauld have not disdained to-"

"Nevertheless, I disdain!" I retorted. "And more, I tell you, and I bid you remember it, you will have to answer for the work you are doing. I have told you it is treason. It is treason; I will have neither act nor part in it. Now go."

"There will be burning," the smith muttered.

"Begone!" I said sternly. "If you do not-"

"Before the morn is old the sky will be red," he answered. "On your head, Seigneur, be it!"

I aimed a blow at him with my cane; but he avoided it with a kind of dignity, and stalked away, Doury following him with a pale, hang-dog face, and his finery sitting very ill upon him. I stood and watched them go, and then I turned to the Curé to hear what he had to say.

But I found him gone also. He, too, had slipped away; through the house, to intercept them at the gates, perhaps, and dissuade them. I waited for him, querulously tapping the walk with my stick, and watching the corner of the house. Presently he came round it, holding his hat an inch or two above his head, his lean, tall figure almost shadowless, for it was noon. I noticed that his lips moved as he came towards me; but, when I spoke, he looked up cheerfully.

"Yes," he said in answer to my question, "I went through the house, and stopped them."

"It would be useless," I said. "Men so mad as to think that they could replace his Majesty's Government with a Committee of smiths and pastrycooks-"

"I have joined it," he answered, smiling faintly.

"The Committee?" I ejaculated, breathless with surprise.

"Even so."

"Impossible!"

"Why?" he said quietly. "Have I not always predicted this day? Is not this what Rousseau, with his *Social Contract*, and Beaumarchais, with his 'Figaro,' and every philosopher who ever repeated the one, and every fine lady who ever applauded the other, have been teaching? Well, it has come, and I have advised you, M. le Vicomte, to stand by your order. But I, a poor man, I stand by mine. And for the Committee of what seems to you, my friend, impossible people, is not any kind of government" – this more warmly, and as if he were arguing with himself-"better than none? Understand, Monsieur, the old machinery has broken down. The Intendant has fled. The people defy the magistrates. The soldiers side with the people. The *huissiers* and tax collectors are-the Good God knows where!"

"Then," I said indignantly, "it is time for the gentry to-"

"Take the lead and govern?" he rejoined. "By whom? A handful of servants and game-keepers? Against the people? against such a mob as you saw in the Square at Cahors? Impossible, Monsieur."

"But the world seems to be turning upside down," I said helplessly.

"The greater need of a strong unchanging holdfast-not of the world," he answered reverently; and he lifted his hat a moment from his head and stood in thought. Then he continued: "However, the matter is this. I hear from Doury that the gentry are gathering at Cahors, with the view of combining, as you suggest, and checking the people. Now, it must be useless, and it may be worse. It may lead to the very excesses they would prevent."

"In Cahors?"

"No, in the country. Buton, be sure, did not speak without warrant. He is a good man, but he knows some who are not, and there are lonely châteaux in Quercy, and dainty women who have never known the touch of a rough hand, and-and children."

"But," I cried aghast, "do you fear a Jacquerie?"

"God knows," he answered solemnly. "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge. How many years have men spent at Versailles the peasant's blood, life, bone, flesh! To pay back at last, it may be, of their own! But God forbid, Monsieur, God forbid. Yet, if ever-it comes now."

* * * * *

When he was gone I could not rest. His words had raised a fever in me. What might not be afoot, what might not be going on, while I lay idle? And, presently, to quench my thirst for news, I mounted and rode out on the way to Cahors. The day was hot, the time for riding ill-chosen; but the exercise did me good. I began to recover from the giddiness of thought into which the Curé's fears, coming on the top of Buton's warning, had thrown me. For a while I had seen things with their eyes; I had allowed myself to be carried away by their imaginations; and the prospect of a France ruled by a set of farriers and postillions had not seemed so bizarre as it began to look, now that I had time, mounting the long hill, which lies one league from Saux and two from Cahors, to consider it calmly. For a moment, the wild idea of a whole gentry fleeing like hares before their peasantry, had not seemed so very wild.

Now, on reflection, beginning to see things in their normal sizes, I called myself a simpleton. A Jacquerie? Three centuries and more had passed since France had known the thing in the dark ages. Could any, save a child alone in the night, or a romantic maiden solitary in her rock castle, dream of its recurrence? True, as I skirted St. Alais, which lies a little aside from the road, at the foot of the hill, I saw at the village-turning a sullen group of faces that should have been bent over the hoe; a group, gloomy, discontented, waiting-waiting, with shock heads and eyes glittering under low brows, for God knows what. But I had seen such a gathering before; in bad times, when seed was lacking, or when despair, or some excessive outrage on the part of the *fermier*, had driven the peasants to fold their hands and quit the fields. And always it had ended in nothing, or a hanging at most. Why should I suppose that anything would come of it now, or that a spark in Paris must kindle a fire here?

In fact, I as good as made up my mind; and laughed at my simplicity. The Curé had let his predictions run away with him, and Buton's ignorance and credulity had done the rest. What, I now saw, could be more absurd than to suppose that France, the first, the most stable, the most highly civilised of States, wherein for two centuries none had resisted the royal power and stood, could become in a moment the theatre of barbarous excesses? What more absurd than to conceive it turned into the *Petit Trianon* of a gang of *rôturiers* and *canaille?*

At this point in my thoughts I broke off, for, as I reached it, a coach came slowly over the ridge before me and began to descend the road. For a space it hung clear-cut against the sky, the burly figure of the coachman and the heads of the two lackeys who swung behind it visible above the hood. Then it began to drop down cautiously towards me. The men behind sprang down and locked the wheels, and the lumbering vehicle slid and groaned downwards, the wheelers pressing back, the leading horses tossing their heads impatiently. The road there descends not in *lacets*, but straight, for nearly half a mile between poplars; and on the summer air the screaming of the wheels and the jingling of the harness came distinctly to the ear.

Presently I made out that the coach was Madame St. Alais'; and I felt inclined to turn and avoid it. But the next moment pride came to my aid, and I shook my reins and went on to meet it.

I had scarcely seen a person except Father Benôit since the affair at Cahors, and my cheek flamed at the thought of the *rencontre* before me. For the same reason the coach seemed to come on very slowly; but at last I came abreast of it, passed the straining horses, and looked into the carriage with my hat in my hand, fearing that I might see Madame, hoping I might see Louis, ready with a formal salute at least. Politeness required no less.

But sitting in the place of honour, instead of M. le Marquis, or his mother, or M. le Comte, was one little figure throned in the middle of the seat; a little figure with a pale inquiring face that blushed scarlet at sight of me, and eyes that opened wide with fright, and lips that trembled piteously. It was Mademoiselle!

Had I known a moment earlier that she was in the carriage and alone, I should have passed by in silence; as was doubtless my duty after what had happened. I was the last person who should have intruded on her. But the men, grinning, I dare say, at the encounter-for probably Madame's treatment of me was the talk of the house-had drawn up, and I had reined up instinctively; so that before I quite understood that she was alone, save for two maids who sat with their backs to the horses, we were gazing at one another-like two fools!

"Mademoiselle!" I said.

"Monsieur!" she answered mechanically.

Now, when I had said that, I had said all that I had a right to say. I should have saluted, and gone on with that. But something impelled me to add-"Mademoiselle is going-to St. Alais?"

Her lips moved, but I heard no sound. She stared at me like one under a spell. The elder of her women, however, answered for her, and said briskly: —

"Ah, *oui*, Monsieur."

"And Madame de St. Alais?"

"Madame remains at Cahors," the woman answered in the same tone, "with M. le Marquis, who has business."

Then, at any rate, I should have gone on; but the girl sat looking at me, silent and blushing; and something in the picture, something in the thought of her arriving alone and unprotected at St. Alais, taken with a memory of the lowering faces I had seen in the village, impelled me to stand and linger; and finally to blurt out what I had in my mind.

"Mademoiselle," I said impulsively, ignoring her attendants, "if you will take my advice-you will not go on."

One of the women muttered "*Ma foi!*" under her breath. The other said "Indeed!" and tossed her head impertinently. But Mademoiselle found her voice.

"Why, Monsieur?" she said clearly and sweetly, her eyes wide with a surprise that for the moment overcame her shyness.

"Because," I answered diffidently-I repented already that I had spoken-"the state of the country is such-I mean that Madame la Marquise scarcely understands perhaps that-that-"

"What, Monsieur?" Mademoiselle asked primly.

"That at St. Alais," I stammered, "there is a good deal of discontent, Mademoiselle, and-"

"At St. Alais?" she said.

"In the neighbourhood, I should have said," I answered awkwardly. "And-and in fine," I continued very much embarrassed, "it would be better, in my poor opinion, for Mademoiselle to turn and-"

"Accompany Monsieur, perhaps?" one of the women said; and she giggled insolently.

Mademoiselle St. Alais flashed a look at the offender, that made me wink. Then with her cheeks burning, she said: —

"Drive on!"

I was foolish and would not let ill alone. "But, Mademoiselle," I said, "a thousand pardons, but-"

"Drive on!" she repeated; this time in a tone, which, though it was still sweet and clear, was not to be gainsaid. The maid who had not offended-the other looked no little scared-repeated the order, the coach began to move, and in a moment I was left in the road, sitting on my horse with my hat in my hand, and looking foolishly at nothing.

The straight road running down between lines of poplars, the descending coach, lurching and jolting as it went, the faces of the grinning lackeys as they looked back at me through the dust-I well remember them all. They form a picture strangely vivid and distinct in that gallery where so many more important have faded into nothingness. I was hot, angry, vexed with myself; conscious that I had trespassed beyond the becoming, and that I more than deserved the repulse I had suffered. But through all ran a thread of a new feeling-a quite new feeling. Mademoiselle's face moved before my eyes-showing through the dust; her eyes full of dainty surprise, or disdain as delicate, accompanied me as I rode. I thought of her, not of Buton or Doury, the Committee or the Curé, the heat or the dull road. I ceased to speculate except on the chances of a peasant rising. That, that alone assumed a new and more formidable aspect; and became in a moment imminent and probable. The sight of Mademoiselle's childish face had given a reality to Buton's warnings, which all the Curé's hints had failed to impart to them.

So much did the thought now harass me, that to escape it I shook up my horse, and cantered on, Gil and André following, and wondering, doubtless, why I did not turn. But, wholly taken up with the horrid visions which the blacksmith's words had called up, I took no heed of time until I awoke to find myself more than half-way on the road to Cahors, which lies three leagues and a mile from Saux. Then I drew rein and stood in the road, in a fit of excitement and indecision. Within the half-hour I might be at Madame St. Alais' door in Cahors, and, whatever happened then, I should have no need to reproach myself. Or in a little more I might be at home, ingloriously safe.

Which was it to be? The moment, though I did not know it, was fateful. On the one hand, Mademoiselle's face, her beauty, her innocence, her helplessness, pleaded with me strangely, and dragged me on to give the warning. On the other, my pride urged me to return, and avoid such a reception as I had every reason to expect.

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