The Last Vendée

by Alexandre Dumas

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Title: The Last Vendée; or, the She-Wolves of Machecoul

Author: Alexandre Dumas

Release date: August 26, 2015 [eBook #49784] Most recently updated: October 24, 2024

Language: English

Other information and formats: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/49784

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Transcriber's Notes: 1. Page scan source: https://archive.org/details/lastvendeeorshe00duma (University of California Libraries) 2. The diphthong oe is represented by [oe]

Dumas

Illustrated Sterling edition

THE LAST VENDÉE

OR, THE

SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL

TWO VOLUMES IN ONE

BY

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON

DANA ESTES & COMPANY

PUBLISHERS

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THE LAST VENDÉE;

OR,

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL

VOLUME I.

THE LAST VENDÉE;

OR,

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL

I.

CHARETTE'S AIDE-DE-CAMP.

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

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

The cracked walls of this manor-house, its broken windows, and its damp roofs covered with wild iris and parasite mosses, gave it, in spite of its feudal pretensions and flanking turrets, so forlorn an appearance that no one at a passing glance would

envy its possessor, were it not for its exquisite situation opposite to the noble trees of the forest of Machecoul, the verdant billows of which rose on the horizon as far as the eye could reach.

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

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

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

When the doom of the Bastille sounded, and the demolition of the old house of the kings foreshadowed the overthrow of royalty, the Marquis de Souday, having inherited, not great wealth,--for nothing of that was left, as we have said, except the old manor-house,--but the name and title of his father, was page to his Royal Highness, Monsieur le Comte de Provence. At sixteen--that was then his time of life--events are only accidental circumstances; besides, it would have been extremely difficult for any youth to keep from being heedless and volatile at the epicurean, voltairean, and constitutional court of the Luxembourg, where egotism elbowed its way undisguisedly.

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

"Monseigneur, it is done," he said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Our young page, de Souday, thought too much of his reputation as a man of fashion to stay in France, although it was precisely there that the monarchy needed its most zealous supporters. He therefore emigrated, and as no one paid any heed to a page only eighteen years old, he reached Coblentz safely and took part in filling up the ranks of the musketeers who were then being remodelled on the other side of the Rhine under the orders of the Marquis de Montmorin. During the first royalist

struggles he fought bravely under the three Condés, was wounded before Thionville, and then, after many disappointments and deceptions, met with the worst of all; namely, the disbanding of the various corps of émigrés,--a measure which took the bread out of the mouths of so many poor devils. It is true that these soldiers were serving against France, and their bread was baked by foreign nations.

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

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

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

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

It was while the Grand Army was being slowly destroyed in Le Mans that Charette, appointed commander-in-chief of Lower Poitou and seconded by the Chevalier de Couëtu and Jolly, had collected his little army. Charette, at the head of this army,

and la Rochejaquelein, followed by ten men only, met near Maulevrier. Charette instantly perceived that la Rochejaquelein came as a general, not as a soldier; he had a strong sense of his own position, and did not choose to share his command with any one. He was therefore cold and haughty in manner, and went to his own breakfast without even asking Rochejaquelein to share it with him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As he withdrew to seek some rest, after doing his last sixty miles on horseback, the marquis came upon a young guard, who was five or six years older than himself, and was now standing, hat in hand, and looking at him with affectionate respect. Souday

recognized the son of one of his father's farmers, with whom he had hunted as a lad with huge satisfaction; for no one could head off a boar as well or urge on the hounds after the animal was turned with such vigor.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We should be greatly tempted to follow Charette, and consequently our young hero, on one of the many adventurous expeditions undertaken by the royalist general, which won him the reputation of being the greatest partisan leader the world has seen; but history is a seductive siren, and if you imprudently obey the sign she makes you to follow her, there is no knowing where you will be led. We must simplify our tale as much as possible, and therefore we leave to others the

opportunity of relating the expedition of the Comte d'Artois to Noirmoutiers and the Île Dieu, the strange conduct of the prince, who remained three weeks within sight of the French coast without landing, and the discouragement of the royalist army when it saw itself abandoned by those for whom it had fought so gallantly for more than two years.

In spite of which discouragement, however, Charette not long after won his terrible victory at Les Quatre Chemins. It was his last; for treachery from that time forth took part in the struggle. De Couëtu, Charette's right arm, his other self after the death of Jolly, was enticed into an ambush, captured, and shot. In the last months of his life Charette could not take a single step without his adversary, whoever he was, Hoche or Travot, being instantly informed of it.

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

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

The spot was La Prélinière, in the parish of Saint-Sulpice. But with thirty-two men Charette did not choose to await the enemy; he went to meet them. At La Guyonnières he met General Valentin with two hundred grenadiers and chasseurs. Charette's position was a good one, and he intrenched it. There, for three hours, he sustained the charges and fire of two hundred republicans. Twelve of his men fell around him. The Army of the Chouannerie, which was twenty-four thousand strong

when M. le Comte d'Artois lay off the Île Dieu without landing, was now reduced to twenty men.

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

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

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

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

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

The young man stopped.

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

Souday hesitated to obey.

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

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

Charette

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

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

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

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

"Kiss me," said the latter.

The young man kissed him.

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

Souday cast a look at Jean Oullier.

"Are you coming?" he said.

But his follower shook his head gloomily.

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

"Here, what?"

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

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

But at the end of some fifty paces Jean Oullier, finding a thick bush at hand, slipped

into it like a snake, with a gesture of farewell to the Marquis de Souday.

The marquis continued his way alone.

II.

THE GRATITUDE OF KINGS.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now such pleasures as a penniless exile could command were not of a high order; and thus it happened that, little by little, he lost his former elegance and the look and manner of gentleman as his tastes deteriorated. He drank ale and porter instead of

champagne, and contented himself with the bedizened women of the Haymarket and Regent Street,--he who had chosen his first loves among the duchesses.

Soon the looseness of his principles and the pressure of his needs drove him into connections from which his reputation suffered. He accepted pleasures when he could not pay for them; his companions in debauchery were of a lower class than himself. After a time his own class of émigrés turned away from him, and by the natural drift of things, the more the marquis found himself neglected by his rightful friends, the deeper he plunged into the evil ways he had now entered.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

the terror of leaving the future of her children in his hands.

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

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

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

After thus separating from all that united him with the past, the Marquis de Souday

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

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

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

What was really fine about all this was that these excuses and hypocrisies did not hinder the Marquis de Souday from doing his duty,--that is, from leaving his poor

castle to defend the white flag when Napoleon made his marvellous return from Elba. Napoleon fell again, and for the second time the marquis re-entered Paris with the legitimate princes. But this time, wiser than he was in 1814, he merely asked of the restored monarchy for the place of Master of Wolves to the arrondissement of Machecoul,--an office in the royal gift which, being without salary or emolument, was willingly accorded to him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

III.

THE TWINS.

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

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

As well as he could remember, Jean Oullier before joining Charette's army had lived

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

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

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

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

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

they had only been stationed there to await the coming of the peasant.

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

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

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

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

"Tinguy!"

The man approached.

"Who is it calls me?" he said.

"I am Jean Oullier," replied the Chouan.

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

"You must answer me," he said.

"Are you a man?"

"Yes."

"Then question me and I will answer."

"My father?"

"Dead."

"My wife?"

"Dead."

"My two children?"

"Dead."

"Thank you."

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then resting his hand on the horse's neck, he set the pace for the animal to take,--a gentle trot of six miles an hour. That evening Jean Oullier was at the castle. The marquis received him with visible delight. He had worried all day over the idea that

Jean Oullier might be absent, or dead. It is not necessary to say that the idea of that death worried him not for Jean Oullier's sake but for his own. We have already informed our readers that the Marquis de Souday was slightly selfish.

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

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

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

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

Now it so happened that, during the time which had elapsed between the departure of the nurse and the arrival of Jean Oullier, the weather had been rainy. The marquis, confined to the castle, felt terribly bored. Feeling bored, he sent for his daughters and began to play with them. Putting one astride his neck, and perching the other on his back, he was soon galloping on all fours round the room, like Henri of Navarre. Only, he improved on the amusement which his Majesty afforded his progeny by imitating with his mouth not only the horn of the hunter, but the barking and yelping

of the whole pack of hounds. This domestic sport diverted the Marquis de Souday immensely, and it is safe to say that the little girls had never laughed so much in their lives.

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

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

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

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

"You can start to-morrow."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I'm afraid not."

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

IV.

HOW JEAN OULLIER, COMING TO SEE THE MARQUIS FOR AN HOUR,

WOULD BE THERE STILL IF THEY HAD NOT BOTH BEEN IN THEIR GRAVE THESE TEN YEARS.

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

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

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

"Damn marriage!" cried the marquis to himself, occasionally, when he seemed to be thinking of quite other things. "Why do I want to row in that boat when I have seen so many good fellows come to grief in it? Heavens and earth! I'm not so young a

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

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

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

Jean Oullier, who had hung the key of his house at La Chevrolière to a nail, had never, in fourteen years, had the least idea of taking it down. He had waited patiently till his master gave him the order to go home. But as, ever since his arrival, the château had been neat and clean; as the marquis had never once missed a button; as the hunting-boots were always properly greased; as the guns were kept with all the care of the best armory at Nantes; as Jean Oullier, by means of certain coercive proceedings, of which he learned the secret from a former comrade of the "brigand army," had, little by little, brought the cook not to vent her ill-humor on her master;

as the hounds were always in good condition, shiny of coat, neither fat nor thin, and able to bear a long chase of eight or ten hours, ending mostly in a kill; as the chatter and the pretty ways of his children and their expansive affection varied the monotony of his existence; as his talks and gossip with Jean Oullier on the stirring incidents of the old war, now passed into a tradition (it was thirty-six years distant), enlivened his dull hours and the long evenings and the rainy days,--the marquis, finding once more the good care, the quiet ease, the tranquil happiness he had formerly enjoyed with Eva, with the additional and intoxicating joys of hunting,--the marquis, we say, put off from day to day, from month to month, from year to year, deciding on the separation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The fact was, the Marquis de Souday was surrounded by little newly made nobles, who envied him his truly illustrious name, and asked nothing better than to fling

back upon him the contempt with which his ancestors had probably treated theirs. So when they saw him keep in his own house, and call his daughters, the children of an illegitimate union, they began to trumpet forth the evils of his life in London; they exaggerated his wrong-doing and made poor Eva (saved by a miracle from a life of degradation) a common woman of the town. Consequently, little by little, the country squires of Beauvoir, Saint-Leger, Bourgneuf, Saint-Philbert, and Grand-Lieu, avoided the marquis, under pretence that he degraded the nobility,--a matter about which, taking into account the mushroom character of their own rank, they were very good to concern themselves.

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

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

spoke of the daughters of the Marquis de Souday with meaning smiles, expressive of hopes, if not of memories. Dowagers crossed themselves on pronouncing their names, and nurses threatened little children when they were naughty with goblin tales of them.

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

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

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

V.

A LITTER OF WOLVES.

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

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

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

Consequently, the first persons who risked telling him of the rumors current in the neighborhood were so sharply rebuked for it that they were frightened and warned

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

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

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

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

It was an occasion impatiently awaited by the marquis, who for the last three months had been expecting grand sport from it,--the object being to capture a litter of young

wolves, which Jean Oullier had discovered before their eyes were opened, and which he had, being a faithful and knowing huntsman to a Master of Wolves, watched over and cared for for several months. This last statement may demand some explanations to those of our readers who are not familiar with the noble art of venery.

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

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

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

great joy when he one day found the den depopulated and knew that the mother-wolf had taken off her cubs on some excursion.

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

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

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

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

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

him by the tail, and flung him to the dogs, who had followed his doubling.

These successful kills immensely delighted the marquis, who did not choose to end the matter here. He discussed with Jean Oullier whether it was best to call in the dogs and attack at the same place, or whether, as the rest of the cubs were evidently afoot, it would not be best to let the hounds into the wood pell-mell to find as they pleased.

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

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

line at the same gait.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

that they were still following their father, continued their way along the dangerous road.

In about fifteen minutes from the time they lost sight of their father they came to a place where the road was deeply sunken between two slopes, at the top of which were rows of trees, the branches meeting and interlacing above their heads. There they stopped suddenly, thinking that they heard at a little distance the well-known barking of their dogs. Almost at the same moment a gun went off close beside them, and a large hare, with bloody hanging ears, ran from the hedge and along the road before them, while loud cries of "Follow! follow! tally-ho! Tally-ho!" came from the field above the narrow roadway.[1]

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

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

VI.

THE WOUNDED HARE.

Among the hedges of Lower Poitou (constructed, like the Breton hedges, with bent and twisted branches interlacing each other) it is no reason, because a hare and six hounds have passed through, that the opening they make should be considered in the

light of a porte-cochère; on the contrary, the luckless young man was held fast as though his neck were in the collar of the guillotine. In vain he pushed and struggled violently, and tore his hands and face till both were bloody; it was impossible for him to advance one inch.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But the girl's laughter had pricked the vanity of the youth even more than the thorns had pricked his body; so that no matter how courteously Bertha worded her proposal, it did not make the unfortunate captive forget the hilarity of which he had

been the object. So he kept silence; and, with the air of a man resolved to get out of his troubles without the help of any one, he made a last and still more strenuous effort.

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

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

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

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

"Do you suffer much, monsieur?"

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

Although the youth who spoke was certainly young,--for, as we have said, he was

only twenty,--there was something so infantine in his accent and so ludicrously out of keeping with his height and his huntsman's dress in his words, that the sisters, in spite of their compassion for his wound, could not restrain another peal of laughter.

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

"Don't do that!" said Bertha.

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

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

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

"Do as you please, mademoiselle."

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

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

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

"Oh, no, mademoiselle; I am not a hunter. I was carried away by a momentary

excitement, which I cannot now at all understand. At present I am perfectly cool, and I know how right my mother was to call the amusement of hunting, which consists in finding pleasure and gratified vanity in the agony and death of a poor, defenceless, dumb animal, ridiculous and degrading."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why so?"

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

The two girls looked at each other. Women as they were, they would have cared little for such a trifle; but they refrained from laughing, strong as the temptation was,

seeing by this time the extreme nervous susceptibility of the young man.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"How so?" he asked.

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

The young man shook his head in a hopeless way.

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

"Has she positively forbidden you to hunt?"

"Oh, dear, yes!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No, no, we shall remember them," said Mary, "to prevent ourselves from ever

hurting the feelings of others as we hurt yours; for see what the consequences have been!"

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

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

VII.

MONSIEUR MICHEL.

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

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

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

Heaven seemed disposed to satisfy his curiosity at once. He had hardly started on his

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Jean Oullier looked askance at his blundering questioner.

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

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

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

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

Left to himself the young man took a few more steps in the path he had taken when the young girls left him; then turning to the left he went into a field. In that field was a peasant ploughing. The peasant was a man about forty years of age, who was distinguishable from the peasants of Poitou by a shrewd and sly expression of countenance peculiarly Norman. He was ruddy in complexion, his eyes were keen and piercing; but his constant effort seemed to be to diminish, or rather to conceal, their keenness by perpetually blinking them. He probably thought that proceeding gave a look of stupidity, or at least of good humor, which checked the distrust of others; but his artful mouth, with its corners sharply defined, and curling up like those of an antique Pan, betrayed, in spite of him, that he was one of those wonderful products that usually follow the crossing of Mans and Norman blood.

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

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

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

of a hare, exclaimed:--

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

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

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

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

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

"Do you still hunt at night, Courtin?"

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

"The gendarmes will catch you some night."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And has two daughters?" continued Michel.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I have not met them," he said.

By the tone of his answer Courtin doubted his words.

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

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

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

Going from one deduction to another, Courtin, who was logical in mind, concluded

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

VIII.

THE BARONNE DE LA LOGERIE.

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

At the same moment the owner of the voice appeared on the other side of the hedge

fence which separated Courtin's field from that of his neighbor. This person, this lady, may have been forty to forty-five years of age. We must try to explain her to the reader.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The young man was still dumb.

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

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

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

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

Courtin's expression of countenance was more humble than ever; but it changed

when the mother, getting over the fence with less agility than before, left the son free to whisper to Courtin:--

"I'll be here to-morrow."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Besides all this, he changed his name,--or rather lengthened it,--which was, for those

whose names were too short, the great ambition of that period. This is how the coveted addition was managed.

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

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

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

He was born a peasant; he had lived twenty-five years of his life among peasants (barring the two or three years he was in the quartermaster's office), and he knew exactly how to deal with peasants. In the first place, he had to make them forgive his prosperity. He made himself what is called "the good prince," found a few old comrades of the Vendéan days, shook hands with them, spoke with tears in his eyes

of the deaths of poor Monsieur Jolly and dear Monsieur Couëtu and the worthy Monsieur Charette. He informed himself about the needs of the village, which he had never before visited, had a bridge built to open important communication between the department of the Lower Loire and that of La Vendée, repaired three county roads and rebuilt a church, endowed an orphan asylum and a home for old men, received so many benedictions, and found such pleasure in playing this patriarchal part that he expressed the intention of living only six months of the year in Paris and the other six at his Château de la Logerie.

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

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

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

during the night.

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

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

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

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

The inquiry, therefore, went no farther. The death of the ex-contractor was attributed to accident; it was supposed that a stray ball had struck him (as sometimes happens when game is driven), without evil intention on the part of whoever fired it. And yet, in spite of this explanation, a vague rumor got about of some accomplished revenge. It was said--but said in the lowest whisper, as if each tuft of gorse still concealed the gun of a Chouan--it was said that a former soldier of Jolly or Couëtu or Charette had

made the unfortunate purveyor expiate the betrayal and death of those illustrious leaders; but there were too many persons interested in the secret to let it ever be openly asserted.

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

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

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

and all its dangers. Never would she listen to the idea of his entering any sort of public school; even those of the Jesuits were dangerous in her eyes, from the readiness of the good fathers to accommodate themselves to the social obligations of the young men confided to their care. Though the heir of all the Michels received some lessons from masters, which, so far as arts and sciences go, were indispensable to the education of a young man it was always in presence of the mother and on a plan approved by her; for she alone directed the course of ideas and instruction, especially on the moral side, which were given to her son.

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

IX.

GALON-D'OR AND ALLÉGRO.

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

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

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

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

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

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

If Michel's mind had not been so pre-occupied he would undoubtedly have paid attention to his mother's words, for the sick man was his foster-father, a farmer named Tinguy, and the girl who had come to ask help was his foster-sister, Rosine,

for whom he had the greatest affection. But at this moment his thoughts were all rushing toward Souday, and more especially to that charming creature who bore the name of Mary.

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

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

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

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

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

conceal.

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

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

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

"She scolded me a little."

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

"I took good care not to."

"Or the wolves?"

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

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

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

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

"What do you mean by that?"

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

"What are they?" asked the young baron.

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

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

"The dogs of that brigand Jean Oullier."

"Why did you take his dogs?"

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

"By what right?"

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

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

"Please explain those rights, Courtin."

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

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

"That's very true; as Master of wolves he can hunt wolves in the forest of Machecoul, but not on the plain. Besides, as you know yourself," continued Courtin, with a sneering smile, "as you saw yourself, he was not hunting a wolf at all, but a hare--and moreover, that hare was shot by one of his own cubs."

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

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

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

I gave Monsieur le marquis' dogs the right to hunt over my land?"

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

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

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

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

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

"At dinner?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Then what is liberty, Monsieur Michel?"

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

"Oh, as for me," said Courtin, "I don't know anything about all that. I am a mayor and the holder of land; and I have captured the best hounds of the Marquis de Souday's pack, Galon-d'Or and Allégro, and I shall not give them up. Let him come

after them, and when he does I shall ask him what he has been doing in certain meetings at Torfou and Montaigu."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, I know what I mean."

"Yes, but I don't."

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

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

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

"What people?"

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

Michel reddened to the whites of his eyes.

"You say the nobles are conspiring, Courtin?"

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

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

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

"But," exclaimed Michel, with an eagerness there was no mistaking, "you told me

yourself, Courtin, that if they went about at night it was to help the poor sick people."

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

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

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

"Well, they've caught you."

"Caught me!"

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

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

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

Michel shook his head.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The young man was left alone with the two dogs.

X.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But did he really want a hat? The hat, that is, the lack of it, would be set down to neighborly eagerness; or else the wind had taken it; or else a branch had knocked it down a ravine, and he could not follow it on account of the dogs. At any rate, it was

worse to encounter his mother than to go without his hat; accordingly he started, hatless, leading the dogs in the leash.

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

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

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

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

He had scarcely gone a few hundred steps before the same cry, or rather call, was repeated, but very much nearer and therefore more distinct than the first. The dogs

answered by a long howl and a more determined drag on their collars. The young man now felt certain that the cry proceeded from some one in search of the dogs, and he bawled to them (hauler). We beg pardon of our readers for using so unacademic a word, but it is the one our peasants use to represent the peculiar shout of a huntsman calling in his dogs. It has the advantage of being expressive; and besides (for a last and better reason), I know no other.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Kennel! kennel, scamps!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why not to-day?"

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

"Why didn't you ask for me?"

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

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

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

"What help can the wolves give you?"

Michel forced himself to utter the word.

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

"What is the matter with him?"

"A fever he caught in the marshes."

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

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

"What does the doctor say?"

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

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

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

"Oh, impossible!"

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

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

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

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

"Who are not rich?"

"The Demoiselles de Souday."

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

"What is it, then?"

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

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

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

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

But how could he suppose that a young girl of eighteen, the daughter of the Marquis de Souday, would leave her home at eight o'clock at night and go five miles to nurse a poor peasant ill of a dangerous fever? It was not only improbable, but it was actually impossible. Rosine must have made the sisters better than they were, just as others made them worse.

Besides, was it believable that his mother, noted for her piety and claiming all the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The young man went close up to Bertha.

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

"Of course I am."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

XI.

THE FOSTER-FATHER.

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

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

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

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

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

At the noise the young people made on entering the sick man rose on his elbow, with difficulty, but immediately fell back on the bed with a piteous moan. A candle was burning, which lighted the bed only; the rest of the room was in darkness. The light showed, on a species of cot or pallet, a man over fifty years of age, struggling

in the grasp of the demon of fever. He was pale to lividness; his eyes were glassy and sunken, and from time to time his body shook from head to foot, as if it had come in contact with a galvanic battery.

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

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

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

As he went along, he had terrible pains in his head and a bleeding at the nose; his weariness was excessive, and he was forced to sit down once or twice. When he came to a brook he drank of it; but this did not slake his thirst, which was so great that he even drank the water out of a puddle. When at last he reached his field he had not the strength to put a spade into the furrow he had begun the night before, and he stood for some moments leaning on his tool. Then his head turned, and he lay

down, or rather fell down on the ground in a state of utter prostration.

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

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

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

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

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

sweetened it slightly, and let the sick man drink it in place of pure water.

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

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

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

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

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

"Important things?" said Michel, astonished.

"Yes."

"But--" insisted the young man.

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

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

"What then?"

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

"My dear monsieur," said Bertha, "if we stopped to think about such things half the

sick peasants would die. Come, go; and trust to God to take care of me."

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

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

"Go, friend; go!"

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

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

At the end of that time he appeared in the salon, and asked the young man what could possibly bring him there at that unusual time of night. In two words Michel told the doctor the state of the case; and as M. Roger seemed a good deal surprised at his taking so lively an interest in a peasant as to come on foot, at night, with an

agitated manner and bathed in perspiration, the young baron hastened to explain his interest by the ties of affection which naturally bound him to his foster-father.

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

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

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

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

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

her sister told her she had sent the young baron to Palluau for Doctor Roger, and that the young baron had returned in the doctor's carriole!

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

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

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

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

When he reached her the youth, like the Greek of Marathon, was voiceless, breathless, and came near dropping, if not as dead as the Greek, at least in a faint.

He had only strength to say:--

"The doctor is following me."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Bertha went back into the cottage, no doubt to prepare for the doctor's arrival. Michel stayed at the door to receive him. When he saw him coming along in his wicker vehicle, which shook him grotesquely, the young fellow congratulated himself more than ever for having come on foot. It was true that if Bertha had gone

in, as she had just done, when she heard the wheels she would not have seen him in that vulgar trap. But if he had not already returned would she, or would she not, have waited till he came?

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

XII.

NOBLESSE OBLIGE.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Doctor Roger and the young girl looked at each other.

"Massa," said the doctor.

"Marseille," replied Bertha.

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

Bertha returned to the patient.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"No," she said, "stay. We need you still; you must help Rosine to prepare M. Roger's prescriptions while I talk with him about the case." Then to the doctor she said, in a low voice, "Keep them busy, and you can tell me what you know, and I will tell you

what I know." Turning again to Michel she added, in her sweetest voice, "I know, my dear friend, that you will be willing to help Rosine."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes, all," replied Bertha.

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

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

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

"Is it possible! Failed?"

"Yes, Madame was utterly misled."

"Good God! what are you telling me?"

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

"Oh! go on; go on!"

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

"Well?"

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

"Yes; what then?"

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

"And Madame?"

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

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

"Must you go?"

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

"Will you take my carriage? I can get back on foot, and you can return it by Jean

Oullier, or any one, to-morrow."

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

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

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

"Nothing," said Bertha.

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

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

"What! will you allow me?"

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

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

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

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

"I spoke very low."

"Why do you speak low?"

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

"But later?"

"Ah! later, perhaps--"

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

"What does that pantomime mean?" asked Bertha.

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

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

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

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

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

"Really?"

"You will not deny that, I think."

"I?--why should I deny it?"

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

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

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

"Go on."

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

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

"Because La Vendée is not in 1832 what she was in 1793; or rather, because there is

no longer a Vendée."

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

The young man made a hasty movement.

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

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

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

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

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

He, too, was dreaming. He walked beside the gentle Mary, not the harsh, firm

Bertha; instead of the self-reliant Bertha, he felt the weaker Mary leaning on his arm. Ah! if she were only there words would come; all the thousand things of the night--the moon, the stars, the sky--would have rushed to his lips. With Mary he would have been the teacher and the master; with Bertha he was the scholar and the slave.

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

"Do you hear?" said Bertha.

"No," said Michel, shaking his head.

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

"What do you hear?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

had produced, and he advanced.

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

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

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

"The attempt at Marseille has failed."

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

"That's a mistake."

"A mistake?"

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

"Can it be true?"

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

"How did you hear all this?"

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

"Gallant soul!" cried Bertha, enthusiastically.

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

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

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

"Oh, yes," said Bertha, holding out her hand to the young man, who advanced to

take it slowly and sadly.

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

"Why?" she asked.

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

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

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

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

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

The young man stood motionless in the roadway.

"Adieu!" cried Bertha.

"Au revoir!" cried Mary.

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

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

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

"Why?" asked Mary, trembling.

"I love him!" replied Bertha.

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

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

XIII.

A DISTANT COUSIN.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes; undoubtedly, it is I."

"What is all this masquerading about?"

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

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

The count retreated a few steps.

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

"In person, monsieur," said the duchess.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Evidently not with joy," said the duchess.

"No, with terror, madame."

"Oh! you exaggerate the situation."

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

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

"Good God! and under what title?"

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

"What an idea, madame!"

"Come, put it to use."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The company bowed.

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

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

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

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

"Oh! pray present us."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"And Madame left it--"

"Oh! very unwillingly, I assure you."

"Recently?"

"Two years ago last July."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Blundering affair?" said the duchess.

"That's what he called it."

"And the words exactly describe the thing," said the functionary. "Can you conceive

of an expedition of that character for which the arrangements were so carelessly made that it only required a sub-lieutenant of the 13th regiment to arrest one of the leaders of the outbreak and knock the whole affair in the head at once?"

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

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

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

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

"Ah!"

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

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

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

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

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

ground, "I did hear differently."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"What now?" asked the duchess.

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

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

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

"In France."

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

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

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

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

The prefect smiled disdainfully.

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

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

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

"What?"

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

"Madame! madame!" said the old man.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Why, of course," said the latter.

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

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

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

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

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

So saying, the prefect rose.

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

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

my department."

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

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

XIV.

PETIT-PIERRE.

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

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

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

When he recognized Bertha the young man felt a measure of disappointed hope; but as, by virtue of his love, he was full of tenderness for the Marquis de Souday, of sympathy for the crabbed Jean Oullier, and of benevolence for even their dogs, how

could he fail to love Mary's sister? The affection shown to one would certainly bring him nearer to the other; besides, what happiness to hear this sister mention the absent sister. Consequently, he was full of attentions and solicitude for Bertha, who accepted all with a satisfaction she took no pains to conceal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

which began to pour from it.

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

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

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

The peasant shook his head sadly and sighed.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Thank me for what, père Tinguy?"

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

"You heard me?"

This time Tinguy smiled outright.

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

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

"Frightened!" cried the peasant, trying to sit up in his bed. "Frightened! why? I have

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

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

The vicar entered at this moment. Bertha showed him the sick man, and the priest, understanding what she wanted of him, began at once the prayer for the dying.

Michel begged Bertha to leave the room, and the young girl consenting, they both went out after saying a last prayer at Tinguy's bedside.

One after the other, the neighbors came in; each knelt down and repeated after the priest the litanies of death. Two slender candles of yellow wax, placed on either side of a brass crucifix, lighted the gloomy scene.

Suddenly, at the moment when the priest and the assistants were reciting mentally the "Ave Maria!" an owl's cry, sounding not far distant from the cottage, rose above the dull hum of their mutterings. The peasants trembled.

At the sound the dying man, whose eyes were already glazing and his breath hissing, raised his head.

"I'm here!" he cried; "I'm ready! I am the guide."

Then he tried to imitate the owl's cry in reply to the one he had heard, but he could not. The lingering breath gave a sob, his head fell back, his eyes opened widely. He was dead.

A stranger stood on the threshold of the door. He was a young Breton peasant, wearing a broad-brimmed hat, a red waistcoat and silver buttons, a blue jacket embroidered with red, and high leather gaiters. He carried in his hand one of those sticks with iron points, which the country people use when they make a journey.

He seemed surprised at the scene before his eyes; but he asked no question of any one. He quietly knelt down and prayed; then he approached the bed, looked earnestly at the pale, discolored face of the poor peasant. Two heavy tears rolled down his cheeks; he wiped them away, and went out as he had come, silently.

The peasants, used to the religious custom which expects all those who pass the house of death to enter and say a prayer for the soul of the dying and a blessing on the body, were not surprised at the presence of a stranger, and paid no heed to his departure. The latter, on leaving the cottage, met another peasant, younger and smaller than himself, who seemed to be his brother; this one was riding a horse saddled and bridled in peasant fashion.

"Well, Rameau-d'or," said the younger, "what is it?"

"This," replied the other: "there is no place for us in that house. A guest is there whose presence fills it."

"Who is he?"

"Death."

"Who is dead?"

"He whose hospitality we came to ask. I would suggest to you to make a shield of his death and stay here; but I heard some one say that Tinguy died of typhoid fever,

and though doctors deny the contagion, I cannot consent to expose you to it."

"You are not afraid that you were seen and recognized?"

"No, impossible. There were eight or ten persons, men and women, praying round the bed. I went in and knelt down and prayed with them. That is what all Breton and Vendéan peasants do in such cases."

"Well, what can we do now?" asked the younger of the two.

"I have already told you. We had to decide between the château of my former comrade or the cottage of the poor fellow who was to have been our guide,--between luxury and a princely house with poor security, and a narrow cottage, bad beds, buckwheat bread, and absolute safety. God himself has decided the matter. We have no choice; we must take the insecure comfort."

"But you think the château is not safe?"

"The château belongs to a friend of my childhood, whose father was made a baron by the Restoration. The father is dead, and the widow and son are now living in the château. If the son were alone, I should have no anxiety. He is rather weak, but his heart is sound. It is his mother I fear; she is selfish and ambitious, and I could not trust her."

"Oh, pooh! just for one night! You are not adventurous, Rameau-d'or."

"Yes I am, on my own account; but I am answerable to France, or at any rate, to my party for the life of Ma--"

"For Petit-Pierre. Ah, Rameau-d'or, that is the tenth forfeit you owe me since we started."

"It shall be the last, Ma--Petit-Pierre, I should say. In future I will think of you by no other name, and in no other relation than that of my brother."

"Come, then; let us go to the château. I am so weary that I would ask shelter of an ogress,--if there were any."

"We'll take a crossroad, which will carry us there in ten minutes," said the young man. "Seat yourself more comfortably in the saddle; I will walk before you, and you must follow me; otherwise we might miss the path, which is very faint."

"Wait a moment," said Petit-Pierre, slipping from his horse.

"Where are you going?" asked Rameau-d'or, anxiously.

"You said your prayer beside that poor peasant, and I want to say mine."

"Don't think of it!"

"Yes, yes; he was a brave and honest man," persisted Petit-Pierre. "He would have risked his life for us; I may well offer a little prayer beside his body."

Rameau-d'or raised his hat and stood aside to let his young companion pass.

The lad, like Rameau-d'or, entered the cottage, took a branch of holly, dipped it in holy water, and sprinkled the body with it. Then he knelt down and prayed at the foot of the bed, after which he left the cottage, without exciting more attention than his companion had done.

The elder helped Petit-Pierre to mount, and together, one in the saddle, the other on foot, they took their way silently across the fields and along an almost invisible path which led, as we have said, in a straight line to the château de la Logerie. They had hardly gone a hundred steps into the grounds when Rameau-d'or stopped short and laid his hand on the bridle of the horse.

"What is it now?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"I hear steps," said the young man. "Draw in behind those bushes; I will stand against this tree. They'll probably pass without seeing us."

The man[oe]uvre was made with the rapidity of a military evolution, and none too soon; for the new-comer was seen to emerge from the darkness as the pair reached their posts. Rameau-d'or, whose eyes were by this time accustomed to the dim light, saw at once that he was a young man about twenty years of age, running, rather than

walking, in the same direction as themselves. He had his hat in his hand, which made him the more easily recognized, and his hair, blown back by the wind, left his face entirely exposed.

An exclamation of surprise burst from Rameau-d'or, as the young man came close to him; then he hesitated a minute, still in doubt, and allowed the other to pass him by three or four steps, before he cried out:--

"Michel!"

The new-comer, who did not expect to hear his name called in that lonely place, jumped to one side, and said in a voice that quivered with emotion:--

"Who called me?"

"I," said Rameau-d'or, taking off his hat and a wig he had been wearing, and advancing to his friend with no other disguise than his Breton clothes.

"Henri de Bonneville!" exclaimed Baron Michel, in amazement.

"Myself. But don't say my name so loud. We are in a land where every bush and ditch and tree shares with the walls the privilege of having ears."

"True!" said Michel, alarmed; "and besides--"

"Besides what?" asked M. de Bonneville.

"You must have come for the uprising they talk of?"

"Precisely. And now, in two words, on which side are you?"

"I?"

"Yes, you."

"My good friend," said the young baron, "I have no fixed opinions; though I will admit in a whisper--"

"Whisper as much as you like; admit what? Make haste."

"Well, I will admit that I incline toward Henri V."

"My dear Michel," cried the count, gayly, "if you incline toward Henri V. that is enough for me."

"Stop; I don't say that I am positively decided."

"So much the better. I shall finish your conversion; and, in order that I may do so at once, I shall ask you to take me in for the night at your château, and also a friend who accompanies me."

"Where is your friend?" asked Michel.

"Here he is," said Petit-Pierre, riding forward, and bowing to the young baron, with an ease and grace that contrasted curiously with the dress he wore. Michel looked at the little peasant for a moment, and then approaching Bonneville, he said:--

"Henri, what is your friend's name?"

"Michel, you are lacking in all the traditions of hospitality. You forget the 'Odyssey,' my dear fellow, and I am distressed at you. Why do you want to know my friend's name? Isn't it enough if I tell you he is a man of good birth?"

"Are you sure he is a man at all?"

The count and Petit-Pierre burst out laughing.

"So you insist on knowing the names of those you receive in your house?"

"Not for my sake, my dear Henri,--not for mine, I swear to you; but in the château de la Logerie--"

"Well?--in the château de la Logerie?"

"I am not master."

"Oh! then the Baronne Michel is mistress. I had already told my little friend Petit-Pierre that she might be. But it is only for one night. You could take us to your own room, and I can forage in the cellar and larder. I know the way. My young friend could get a night's rest on your bed, and early in the morning I'll find a better place and relieve you of our presence."

"Impossible, Henri. Do not think that it is for myself, I fear; but it will compromise your safety to let you even enter the château."

"How so?"

"My mother is still awake; I am sure of it. She is watching for me; she would see us enter. Your disguise we might find some reason for; but that of your companion, which has not escaped me, how could we explain it to her?"

"He is right," said Petit-Pierre.

"But what else can we do?"

"And," continued Michel, "it is not only my mother that I fear, but--"

"What else?"

"Wait!" said the baron, looking uneasily about him; "let us get away from these bushes."

"The devil!"

"I mean Courtin."

"Courtin? Who is he?"

"Don't you remember Courtin the farmer?"

"Oh! yes, to be sure,--a good sort of fellow, who was always on your side, even against your mother."

"Yes. Well, Courtin is now mayor of the village and a violent Philippist. If he found you wandering about, at night in disguise he would arrest you without a warrant."

"This is serious," said Henri de Bonneville, gravely. "What does Petit-Pierre think of it?"

"I think nothing, my dear Rameau-d'or; I leave you to think for me."

"The result is that you close your doors to us?" said Bonneville.

"That won't signify to you," said Baron Michel, whose eyes suddenly lighted up

with a personal hope,--"it won't signify, for I will get you admitted to another house, where you will be in far greater safety than at La Logerie."

"Not signify! but it does signify. What says my companion?"

"I say that provided some door opens, I don't care where it is. I am ready to drop with fatigue, I am so tired."

"Then follow me," said the baron.

"Is it far?"

"An hour's walk,--about three miles."

"Has Petit-Pierre the strength for it?" asked Henri.

"Petit-Pierre will find strength for it," said the little peasant, laughing.

"Then let us follow Baron Michel," said Bonneville. "Forward, baron!"

And the little group, which had been at a standstill for the last ten minutes, moved away. But they had hardly gone a few hundred steps before Bonneville laid a hand on Michel's shoulder.

"Where are you taking us?" he said.

"Don't be uneasy."

"I will follow you, provided you can promise me a good bed and a good supper for Petit-Pierre, who, as you see, is rather delicate."

"He shall have all and more than I could give him at La Logerie,--the best food in the larder, the best wine in the cellar, the best bed in the castle."

On they went. At the end of some little time Michel said suddenly:--

"I'll go forward now, so that you may not have to wait."

"One moment," said Henri. "Where are we going?"

"To the château de Souday."

"The château de Souday!"

"Yes; you know it very well, with its pointed towers roofed with slate, on the left of the road opposite to the forest of Machecoul."

"The wolves' castle?"

"Yes, the wolves' castle, if you choose to call it so."

"Is that where we are to stay?"

"Yes."

"Have you sufficiently reflected, Michel?"

"Yes, yes; I will answer for everything."

The baron waited to say no more, but set off instantly for the castle, with that velocity of which he had given such unmistakable proof on the night when he went to fetch the doctor to the dying Tinguy.

"Well," asked Petit-Pierre, "what shall we do?"

"There is no choice now but to follow him."

"To the wolves' castle?"

"Yes, to the wolves' castle."

"So be it; but to enliven the way," said the little peasant, "will you be good enough to tell me, my dear Rameau-d'or, who the wolves are?"

Souday

"I will tell you what I have heard of them."

"I can't expect more."

Resting his hand on the pommel of the saddle, the Comte de Bonneville related to Petit-Pierre the sort of legend attaching, throughout the department of the Lower Loire, to the daughters of the Marquis de Souday. But presently, stopping short in his tale, he announced to his companion that they had reached their destination.

Petit-Pierre, convinced that he was about to see beings analogous to the witches in

"Macbeth," was calling up all his courage to enter the dreaded castle, when, at a turn of the road, he saw before him an open gate, and before the gate two white figures, who seemed to be waiting there, lighted by a torch carried behind them by a man of rugged features and rustic clothes. Mary and Bertha--for it was they--informed by Baron Michel, had come to meet their uninvited guests. Petit-Pierre eyed them curiously. He saw two charming young girls,--one fair, with blue eyes and an almost angelic face; the other, with black hair and eyes, a proud and resolute bearing, a frank and loyal countenance. Both were smiling.

Rameau-d'or's young companion slid from his horse, and the two advanced together toward the ladies.

"My friend Baron Michel encouraged me to hope, mesdemoiselles, that your father, the Marquis de Souday, would grant us hospitality," said the Comte de Bonneville, bowing to the two girls.

"My father is absent, monsieur," replied Bertha. "He will regret having lost this occasion to exercise a virtue which in these days we cannot often practise."

"I do not know if Michel told you, mademoiselle, that this hospitality may possibly involve some danger. My young companion and I are almost proscribed persons. Persecution may be the cost of your granting us an asylum."

"You come here in the name of a cause which is ours, monsieur. Were you merely strangers, you would be hospitably received. Being, as you are, royalists and proscribed, you are heartily welcome, even if death and ruin enter this poor household with you. If my father were here he would say the same."

"Monsieur le Baron Michel has, no doubt, told you my name; it remains for me to tell you that of my young companion."

"We do not ask to know it, monsieur; your situation is more to us than your names, whatever they may be. You are royalists, proscribed for a cause to which, women as we are, we would gladly give every drop of our blood. Enter this house; it is neither

rich nor sumptuous, but at least you will find it faithful and discreet."

With a gesture of great dignity, Bertha pointed to the gate, and signed to the two young men to enter it.

"May Saint-Julien be ever blessed!" said Petit-Pierre in Bonneville's ear. "Here is the château and the cottage between which you wanted me to choose, united in this night's lodging. They please me through and through, your wolves."

So saying, he entered the postern, with a graceful inclination of the head to the two young girls. The Comte de Bonneville followed. Mary and Bertha made an amicable gesture of farewell to Michel, and the latter held out her hand to him. But Jean Oullier closed the gate so roughly that the luckless young man had no time to grasp it.

He looked for a few moments at the towers of the castle, which stood out blackly against the dark background of the sky. He watched the lights appearing, one by one, in the windows; and then, at last, he turned and went away.

When he had fairly disappeared the bushes moved, and gave passage to an individual who had witnessed this scene, with a purpose very different from that of the actors in it. That individual was Courtin, who, after satisfying himself that no one was near, took the same path his young master had taken to return to La Logerie.

XV.

AN UNSEASONABLE HOUR.

It was about two in the morning, perhaps, when the young Baron Michel again reached the end of the avenue, which leads to the château de la Logerie. The atmosphere was calm; the majestic silence of the night, which was broken only by the rustling of the leaves, led him into reverie. It is not necessary to say that the two sisters were the objects of his thought, and that the one whose image the baron

followed with as much respect and love as Tobit followed the angel in the Bible, was Mary.

But when he saw before him, at the farther end of the dark arcade of trees beneath which he was walking, the windows of the château, which were sparkling in the moonlight, all his charming visions vanished, and his ideas took a far more practical direction. In place of the ravishing figures of girlhood so lately beside him, he saw the stern and threatening outline of his mother.

We know the terror with which she inspired him. He stopped short. If in all the neighborhood there were any shelter, even a tavern, in which he could spend the night, he would not have returned to the house till the next day, so great were his apprehensions. It was the first time he had ever been late in getting home, and he felt instinctively that his mother was on the watch for him. What should he answer to the dreadful inquiry, "Where have you been?"

Courtin could give him a night's lodging; but if he went to Courtin he should have to tell him all, and the young baron fully understood the danger there was in taking a man like Courtin into his confidence. He decided, therefore, to brave the maternal wrath,--very much as the criminal decides to brave the scaffold, simply because he cannot do otherwise,--and continued his way home.

Nevertheless, the nearer he got to the château the more his resolution faltered. When he reached the end of the avenue where he had to cross the lawn, and when he saw his mother's window, the only lighted window in the building, his heart failed him. No, his forebodings had not misled him; his mother was on the watch. His resolution vanished entirely, and fear, developing the resources of his imagination, put into his head the idea of a trick which, if it did not avert his mother's anger, would at any rate delay the explosion of it.

He turned to the right, glided along in the shadow of a buckthorn hedge, reached the wall of the kitchen garden, over which he climbed, and passed through the gate

leading from the kitchen-garden to the park.

Up to this moment all was well; but now came the most difficult, or rather the most hazardous part of his enterprise. He had to find some window left unfastened by a careless servant, by which he could enter the house and slip back to his own apartment unperceived.

The château de la Logerie consists of a large, square building, flanked at the corners with four towers of the same shape. The kitchens and offices were underground, the reception-rooms on the ground-floor, those of the baroness on the next floor, those of her son above her. Michel examined the house on three sides, trying gently but persistently every door and window, keeping close to the walls, stepping with precaution, and even holding his breath. Neither doors nor windows yielded.

There was still the front of the house to be examined. This was much the most dangerous side, for the windows of the baroness commanded it, and there were no shrubs to cast a protecting shadow. Here he found a window open. True, it was that of his mother's bedroom; but Michel, now desperate, reflected that if he had to be scolded he would rather it were without than within the house, and he resolved on making the attempt.

He was cautiously advancing round the corner tower when he saw a shadow moving on the lawn. A shadow of course meant a body. Michel stopped and gave all his attention to the new arrival. He saw it was a man, and the man was following the path he himself would have taken had he gone, in the first instance, straight to the house. The young baron now made a few steps backward and crouched in the heavy shadow projected by the tower.

The man came nearer. He was not more than fifty yards from the house when Michel heard the harsh voice of his mother speaking from her window. He congratulated himself on not having crossed the lawn and taken the path the man was on.

"Is that you, Michel?" asked the baroness.

"No, madame, no," replied a voice, which the young baron recognized, with amazement not unmingled with fear, as that of Courtin, "you do me too much honor in taking me for Monsieur le baron."

"Good heavens!" cried the baroness, "what brings you here at this hour?"

"Ah! you may well suppose it is something important, Madame la baronne."

"Has any harm happened to my son?"

The tone of agony in which his mother said these words touched the young man so deeply that he was about to rush out and reassure her when Courtin's answer, which came immediately, paralyzed this good intention.

"Oh! no, no, madame; I have just seen the young gars, if I may so call Monsieur le baron, and he is quite well,--up to the present moment at least."

"Present moment!" said the baroness. "Is he in any danger?"

"Well, yes," said Courtin; "he may get into trouble if he persists in running after those female Satans,--and may hell clutch them! It is to prevent such a misfortune that I've taken the liberty to come to you at this time of night, feeling sure that as Monsieur Michel is so late in getting home you would surely be sitting up for him."

"You did right, Courtin. Where is he now,--do you know?"

Courtin looked about him.

"I am surprised he has not come in. I took the county road so as to leave him the wood-path clear, and that's a good half-mile shorter than the road."

"But tell me at once, where has he been; where is he coming from; what has he done; why is he roaming the country at two in the morning, without considering my anxiety or reflecting that he is injuring my health as well as his own?"

"Madame la baronne, I cannot answer those questions in the open air." Then, lowering his voice, he added, "What I have to tell madame is so important that she

had better hear it in her own room. Besides, as the young master is not yet in, he may be here at any moment," said the farmer, looking uneasily about him, "and I wouldn't for all the world have him suspect that I keep a watch upon him, though it is for his own good, and to do you a service."

"Come in, then; you are right," said the baroness. "Come in, at once."

"Beg pardon, madame, but how, if you please?"

"True," said the baroness, "the door is locked."

"If madame will throw me the key--"

"It is inside the door."

"Oh, bother it!"

"I sent the servants to bed, not wishing them to know of my son's misconduct. Wait; I will ring for my maid."

"Oh, madame, no!" exclaimed Courtin, "it is better not to let any one into our secrets; it seems to me the matter is so important that madame might disregard appearances. I know madame was not born to open the door to a poor farmer like me; but once in a way it wouldn't signify. If everybody is asleep in the château, so much the better; we shall be safe from curiosity."

"Really, Courtin, you alarm me," said the baroness, who was in fact prevented from opening the door by a petty pride, which had not escaped the farmer's observation. "I will hesitate no longer."

The baroness withdrew from the window, and a moment later Michel heard the grinding of the key and the bolts of the front door. He listened at first in an agony of apprehension; then he became aware that the door, which opened with difficulty, had not been relocked or bolted,--no doubt because his mother and Courtin were so pre-occupied in mind. He waited a few seconds till he was sure they had reached the upper floor. Then, gliding along the wall, he mounted the portico, pushed open the

door, which turned noiselessly on its hinges, and entered the vestibule.

His original intention had been, of course, to regain his room and await events, while pretending to be asleep. In that case the exact hour of his return home would not be known, and he might still have a chance to get out of the scrape by a fib. But matters were much changed since he formed that intention. Courtin had followed him; Courtin had seen him. Courtin must know that the Comte de Bonneville and his companion had taken refuge in the château de Souday. For a moment Michel forgot himself to think of his friend, whom the farmer, with his violent political opinions, might greatly injure.

Instead of going up to his own floor, he slipped, like a wolf, along his mother's corridor. Just as he reached her door he heard her say:--

"So you really think, Courtin, that my son has been enticed by one of those miserable women?"

"Yes, madame, I am sure of it; and they've got him so fast that I am afraid you'll have a deal of trouble to get him away from them."

"Girls without a penny!"

"As for that, they come of the oldest blood in the country, madame," said Courtin, wishing to sound his way; "and for nobles like you that's something, at any rate."

"Faugh!" exclaimed the baroness; "bastards!"

"But pretty; one is like an angel, the other like a demon."

"Michel may amuse himself with them, as so many others, they say, have done; that's possible; but you can't suppose that he ever dreamed of marrying one of them? Nonsense! he knows me too well to think that I would ever consent to such a marriage."

"Barring the respect I owe to him, Madame la baronne, my opinion is that Monsieur Michel has never reflected at all about it, and doesn't yet know what he feels for the

wolves; but one thing I'm sure of, and that is he is getting himself into another kind of trouble, which may compromise him seriously."

"What do you mean, Courtin?"

"Well, confound it!" exclaimed the farmer, seeming to hesitate, "do you know, madame, that it would be very painful to me, who love and respect you, if my duty compelled me to arrest my young master?"

Michel trembled where he stood; and yet it was the baroness to whom the shock was most severe.

"Arrest Michel!" she exclaimed, drawing herself up; "I think you forget yourself, Courtin."

"No, madame, I do not."

"But--"

"I am your farmer, it is true," continued Courtin, making the baroness a sign with his hand to control herself. "I am bound to give you an exact account of the harvests, on which you have half the profits, and to pay you promptly on the day and hour what is due,--which I do to the best of my ability, in spite of the hard times: but before being your farmer I am a citizen, and I am, moreover, mayor, and in those capacities I have duties, Madame la baronne, which I must fulfil, whether my poor heart suffers or not."

"What nonsense are you talking to me, Maître Courtin? Pray, what has my son to do with your duties as a citizen and your station as mayor?"

"He has this to do with it, Madame la baronne: your son has intimate acquaintance with the enemies of the State."

"I know very well," said the baroness, "that Monsieur le Marquis de Souday holds exaggerated opinions; but any love-affairs that Michel may have with one of his daughters cannot, it seems to me, be turned into a political misdemeanor."

"That love-affair is carrying Monsieur Michel much farther than you think for, Madame la baronne, and I tell you so now. I dare say he has so far only poked the end of his nose into the troubled waters about him; but that's enough for a beginning."

"Come, enough of such metaphors! Explain what you mean, Courtin."

"Well, Madame la baronne, here's the truth. This evening, after being present at the death-bed of that old Chouan Tinguy, and running the risk of bringing a malignant fever home with him, and after accompanying one of the wolves to the château de Souday, Monsieur le baron served as guide to two peasants who were no more peasants than I'm a gentleman; and he took them to the château de Souday."

"Who told you so, Courtin?"

"My own two eyes, Madame la baronne; they are good, and I trust them."

"Did you get an idea who those peasants were?"

"The two false peasants?"

"Yes, of course."

"One, I'd take my oath of it, was the Comte de Bonneville,--a violent Chouan, he! No one can fool me about him; he has been long in the country, and I know him. As for the other--"

Courtin paused.

"Go on," said the baroness, impatiently.

"As for the other, if I'm not mistaken, that's a better discovery still--"

"But who is it? Come, Courtin, tell me at once."

"No, Madame la baronne. I shall tell the name--I shall probably be obliged to do so--to the authorities."

"The authorities! Do you mean to tell me you are going to denounce my son?" cried the baroness, amazed and stupefied at the tone her farmer, hitherto so humble, was

assuming.

"Assuredly I do, Madame la baronne," said Courtin, composedly.

"Nonsense! you would not think of it."

"I do think it, Madame la baronne, and I should be now on the road to Montaigu or even to Nantes, if I had not wished to warn you, so that you may put Monsieur Michel out of harm's way."

"But, supposing that Michel is concerned in this affair," said the baroness, vehemently; "you will compromise me with all my neighbors, and--who knows?--you may draw down horrible reprisals on La Logerie."

"Then we must defend the château, that's all, Madame la baronne."

"Courtin!"

"I saw the great war, Madame la baronne. I was a little fellow then, but I remember it, and on my word of honor I don't want to see the like again. I don't want to see my twenty acres of land a battlefield for both parties, my harvests eaten by one or burned by the other; still less do I want to see the Whites lay hands on the National domain, which they will do if they get the chance. Out of my twenty acres, five belonged to émigrés. I bought 'em and paid for 'em; that's one quarter of all I own. Besides, here's another thing: the government relies upon me, and I wish to justify the confidence of the government."

"But, Courtin," said the baroness, almost ready to come down to entreaty, "matters can't be as serious as you imagine, I am sure."

"Beg pardon, Madame la baronne, they are very serious indeed. I am only a peasant, but that doesn't prevent me from knowing as much as others know, being blessed with a good ear and a gift for listening. The Retz district is all but at the boiling-point; another fagot and the pot will boil over."

"Courtin, you must be mistaken."

"No, Madame la baronne, I am not mistaken. I know what I know. God bless me! the nobles have met three times,--once at the Marquis de Souday's, once at the house of the man they call Louis Renaud, and once at the Comte de Saint-Amand's. All those meetings smelt of powder, Madame la baronne. À propos of powder, there's two hundred weight of it and sacks of cartridges in the Vicar of Montbert's house. Moreover,--and this is the most serious thing of all,--they are expecting Madame la Duchesse de Berry, and from something I have just seen, it is my opinion they won't have long to wait for her."

"Why so?"

"I think she is here already."

"Good God! where?"

"Well, at the château de Souday, where Monsieur Michel took her this evening."

"Michel! oh, the unfortunate boy! But you won't say a word about it, will you, Courtin? Besides, the government must have made its plans. If the duchess attempts to return to La Vendée, she will be arrested before she can get here."

"Nevertheless, she is here," persisted Courtin.

"All the more reason why you should hold your tongue."

"I like that! And what becomes of the profits and the glory of such a prize, not counting that before the capture is made by somebody else the whole country will be in blood and arms? No. Madame la baronne; no, I cannot hold my tongue."

"Then what is to be done? Good God! what can I do?"

"I'll tell you, Madame la baronne; listen to me--"

"Go on."

"Well, as I want to remain your zealous and faithful servant, all the while being a good citizen,--and because I hope that in gratitude for what I am doing for you, you will let me keep my farm on terms that I am able to pay,--I will agree to say nothing

about Monsieur Michel. But you must try to keep him out of this wasps' nest in future. He is in it now, that's true; but there's still time to get him out."

"You need not trouble yourself about that, Courtin."

"But if I might say a word, Madame la baronne--"

"Well, what?"

"I don't quite dare to give advice to Madame la baronne; it is not my place, but--"

"Go on, Courtin; go on."

"Well, in order to get Monsieur Michel completely out of this hornets' nest, I think you'll have--by some means or other, prayers or threats--to make him leave la Logerie and go to Paris."

"Yes, you are right, Courtin."

"Only, I am afraid he won't consent."

"If I decide it, Courtin, he must consent."

"He will be twenty-one in eleven months; he is very nearly his own master."

"I tell you he shall go, Courtin. What are you listening for?"

Courtin had turned his head to the door, as if he heard something.

"I thought some one was in the corridor," he said.

"Look and see."

Courtin took a light and rushed into the passage.

"There was no one," he said, "though I certainly thought I heard a step."

"Where do you suppose he can be, the wretched boy, at this time of night?" said the baroness.

"Perhaps he has gone to my house," said Courtin. "He has confidence in me, and it wouldn't be the first time he has come to tell me of his little troubles."

"Possibly. You had better go home now; and remember your promise."

"And do you remember yours, Madame la baronne. If he comes in lock him up. Don't let him communicate with the wolves, for if he sees them--"

"What then?"

"I shouldn't be surprised to hear some day that he was firing behind the gorse."

"God forbid! Oh! he'll kill me with anxiety. What a luckless idea it was of my husband ever to come to this cursed place!"

"Luckless, indeed, madame,--especially for him."

The baroness bowed her head sadly under the recollections thus evoked. Courtin now left her, looking about him carefully to see that no one was stirring in the château de la Logerie.

XVI.

COURTIN'S DIPLOMACY.

Courtin had hardly taken a hundred steps on the path that led to his farmhouse before he heard a rustling in the bushes near which he passed.

"Who's there?" he said, standing in the middle of the path, and putting himself on guard with the heavy stick he carried.

"Friend," replied a youthful voice.

And the owner of the voice came through the bushes.

"Why, it is Monsieur le baron!" cried the farmer.

"I, myself, Courtin," replied Michel.

"Where are you going at this time of night? Good God! if Madame la baronne knew you were roaming about in the darkness, what do you suppose she would say?" said the farmer, pretending surprise.

"That's just it, Courtin."

"Hang it! I suppose Monsieur le baron has his reasons," said the farmer, in his

jeering tone.

"Yes; and you shall hear them as soon as we get to your house."

"My house! Are you going to my house?" said Courtin, surprised.

"You don't refuse to take me in, do you?" asked Michel.

"Good heavens, no! Refuse to take you into a house which, after all, is yours?"

"Then don't let us lose time, it is so late. You walk first, I'll follow."

Courtin, rather uneasy at the imperative tone of his young master, obeyed. A few steps farther on he climbed a bank, crossed an orchard, and reached the door of his farmhouse. As soon as he entered the lower room, which served him as kitchen and living-room, he drew a few scattered brands together on the hearth and blew up a blaze; then he lighted a candle of yellow wax and stuck it on the chimney-piece. By the light of this candle he saw what he could not see by the light of the moon,--namely, that Michel was as pale as death.

"My God! what's the matter with you, Monsieur le baron?" he exclaimed.

"Courtin," said the young man, frowning, "I heard every word of your conversation with my mother."

"Confound it! were you listening?" said the farmer, a good deal surprised. But, recovering instantly, he added, "Well, what of it?"

"You want your lease renewed next year?"

"I, Monsieur le baron?"

"You, Courtin; and you want it much more than you choose to own."

"Of course I shouldn't be sorry to have it renewed, Monsieur le baron; but if there's any objection it wouldn't be the death of me."

"Courtin, I am the person who will renew your lease, because I shall be of age by that time."

"Yes, that's so, Monsieur le baron."

"But you will understand," continued the young man, to whom the desire of saving the Comte de Bonneville and staying near Mary gave a firmness and resolution quite foreign to his character, "you understand, don't you, that if you do as you said to-night,--that is, if you denounce my friends,--I shall most certainly not renew the lease of an informer?"

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Courtin.

"That is certain. Once out of this farm you may say good-bye to it, Courtin; you shall never return to it."

"But my duty to the government and Madame la baronne?"

"All that is nothing to me. I am Baron Michel de la Logerie; the estate and château de la Logerie belong to me; my mother resigns them when I come of age; I shall be of age in eleven months, and your lease falls in eight weeks later."

"But suppose I renounce my intention, Monsieur le baron?"

"If you renounce your intention, your lease shall be renewed."

"On the same conditions as before?"

"On the same conditions as before."

"Oh, Monsieur le baron, if I were not afraid of compromising you," said Courtin, fetching pen, ink, and paper from the drawer of a desk.

"What does all this mean?" demanded Michel.

"Oh, hang it! if Monsieur le baron would only have the kindness to write down what he has just said,--who knows which of us will die first? For my part, I am ready to swear,--here's a crucifix,--well, I swear by Christ--"

"I don't want your oaths, Courtin, for I shall go from here to Souday and warn Jean Oullier to be on his guard, and Bonneville to get another resting-place."

"So much the more reason," said Courtin, offering a pen to his young master.

Michel took the pen and wrote as follows on the paper which the farmer laid before him:--

"I, the undersigned, Auguste-François Michel, Baron de la Logerie, agree to renew the lease of farmer Courtin on the same conditions as the present lease."

Then, as he was about to date it, Courtin stopped him.

"Don't put the date, if you please, my young master," he said. "We will date it the day after you come of age."

"So be it," said Michel.

He then merely signed it, and left, between the pledge and the signature, a line to receive the future date.

"If Monsieur le baron would like to be more comfortable for the night than on that stool," said Courtin, "I will take the liberty to mention that there is, at his service upstairs, a bed that is not so bad."

"No," replied Michel; "did you not hear me say I was going to Souday?"

"What for? Monsieur le baron has my promise, I pledge him my word to say nothing. He has time enough."

"What you saw, Courtin, another may have seen. You may keep silence because you have promised it; but the other, who did not promise, will speak. Good-bye to you."

"Monsieur le baron will do as he likes," said Courtin; "but he makes a mistake, yes, a great mistake, in going back into that mouse-trap."

"Pooh! I thank you for your advice; but I am not sorry to let you know I am of an age now to do as I choose."

Rising as he said the words, with a firmness of which the farmer had supposed him incapable, he went to the door and left the house. Courtin followed him with his eyes till the door was closed; after which, snatching up the written promise, he read it over, folded it carefully in four, and put it away in his pocket-book. Then,

fancying he heard voices at a little distance, he went to the window and, drawing back the curtain, saw the young baron face to face with his mother.

"Ha, ha, my young cockerel!" he said; "you crowed pretty loud with me, but there's an old hen who'll make you lower your comb."

The baroness, finding that her son did not return, thought that Courtin might be right when he suggested that Michel was possibly at the farmhouse. She hesitated a moment, partly from pride, partly from fear of going out alone at night; but, finally, her maternal uneasiness got the better of her reluctance, and wrapping herself in a large shawl, she set out for the farmhouse. As she approached the door her son came out of it. Then, relieved of her fears for his safety, and seeing him sound and well, her imperious nature reasserted itself.

Michel, for his part, on catching sight of his mother, made a step backward in terror.

"Follow me, sir," said the baroness. "It is not too early, I think, to return home."

The poor lad never once thought of arguing or resisting; he followed his mother passively and obediently as a child. Not a word was exchanged between mother and son the whole way. For that matter, Michel much preferred this silence to a discussion in which his filial obedience, or rather, let us say, his weak nature, would have had the worst of it.

When they reached the château day was breaking. The baroness, still silent, conducted the young man to his room. There he found a table prepared with food.

"You must be hungry and very tired," said the baroness. "There you have food, and here you can rest," she added, waving her hand to the table and the bed, after which she retired, closing the door after her.

The young man trembled as he heard the key turned twice in the lock. He was a prisoner! He fell helplessly into an arm-chair. Events were rushing on like an avalanche, and a more vigorous organization than that of Baron Michel might have given way under them. As it was, he had only a certain small amount of energy, and

that was all expended in his interview with Courtin.

Perhaps he had presumed too much upon his strength when he told Courtin he should go to the château de Souday; at any rate, he was, as his mother said, tired out and very hungry. At Michel's age Nature is a mother, too, who will have her rights. Besides, a certain ease of mind had stolen over him. His mother's words, as she pointed to the table and the bed, seemed to imply that she did not mean to return until he had eaten and slept. It gave him some hours of calm before the storm of explanation.

Michel ate hastily, and then, after trying the door to make sure that he was really a prisoner, he went to bed and to sleep.

At ten o'clock he awoke. The beams of a splendid May sun were coming joyously through his windows. He opened the windows. The birds were singing in the branches, which were just then covered with their young and tender leafage. The roses were budding; the first butterflies were circling in the air. On such a day it seemed as though misfortune were imprisoned and could not come to any one. The young man found a sort of strength in this revival of Nature, and awaited the dreaded interview with his mother with more composure.

But the hours went by. Mid-day struck, and still the baroness did not appear. Michel then noticed, with a certain uneasiness, that the table had been amply supplied, not only for his supper of the night before, but also for the breakfast and dinner of the following day. He began to fear that his captivity might last much longer than he expected. This fear grew deeper as two and then three o'clock struck. He listened for every sound, and after a time he fancied he heard shots in the direction of Montaigu. These sounds had all the regularity of platoon firing, and yet it was impossible to say whether they came actually from a fusillade. Montaigu was six miles from La Logerie, and a distant thunderstorm might produce somewhat the same sounds.

But no! the sky was cloudless; there was no storm. The sounds lasted over an hour;

then all was silent. The baron's uneasiness now became so great that he forgot to eat the food prepared for him. He resolved on one thing,--namely, as soon as night came and the people of the house were in bed he would cut out the lock of the door with his knife and leave the château, not by the front entrance, but by some window on the lower floor.

This possibility of flight restored the prisoner's appetite. He dined like a man who thinks he has a toilsome night before him, and who gathers strength to make head against it.

He finished his dinner about seven in the evening. It would be dusk in another hour. He flung himself on his bed and waited. He would fain have slept, for sleep would have shortened the time of waiting, but his mind was too uneasy. He closed his eyes, to be sure, but his ears, constantly alert, heard every sound. One thing surprised him much; he had seen nothing of his mother. She would certainly, he thought, expect him to do what he could to escape as soon as it was dark. No doubt she was planning something; but what could it be?

Suddenly Michel thought he heard the tinkling of bells which are usually fastened to the collars of post-horses. He ran to the window. He seemed to see, coming along the road from Montaigu, an indistinct group moving rapidly in the gathering darkness toward the château de la Logerie. The sound of horses' hoofs now mingled with the tinkling of the bells. Presently the postilion cracked his whip, probably to announce his coming. No doubt remained; it certainly was a postilion with post-horses on his way to the château.

Instinctively the young man looked toward the stables, and there he saw the servants dragging his mother's travelling-carriage from the coach-house. A flash of light came into his mind. These post-horses from Montaigu, the postilion cracking his whip, the travelling-carriage making ready for use,--no doubt, no doubt at all remained; his mother meant to leave La Logerie and take him with her. That was

why she had locked him up and kept him a prisoner. She meant to come for him at the last moment, force him to get into the carriage with her, and away, away from everything he would be forced to go. She knew her ascendency over her son sufficiently well to be certain he would not venture to resist her.

The consciousness that his mother had this conviction exasperated the young man all the more because he knew it was a true one. It was evident to his own mind that if the baroness once came face to face with him he would not dare to oppose her.

But to leave Mary, renounce that life of emotion to which the sisters had introduced him, to take no part in the drama which the Comte de Bonneville and his mysterious companion had come into La Vendée to play, seemed to him impossible and dishonoring. What would those young girls think of him?

Michel resolved to run all risks rather than endure the humiliation of their contempt.

He went to the window and measured with his eye the height from the ground; it was thirty feet. The young baron stood in thought for a moment. Evidently some great struggle was going on within him. At last it was decided. He went to his desk and took out a large sum of money in gold, with which he filled his pockets. Just then he thought he heard steps in the corridor. He hastily closed his desk and threw himself on his bed, expectant. An observer would have seen by the unusual firmness of the muscles of his face that his resolution was taken.

What was that resolution? In all probability we shall sooner or later discover what it was.

XVII.

THE TAVERN OF AUBIN COURTE-JOIE

It was plain,--even to the authorities, who are usually the last to be informed as to the state of public opinion in the countries they are called upon to govern,--it was plain, we say, that an uprising was contemplated in Brittany and in La Vendée.

We have heard Courtin tell Madame de la Logerie of the meetings of the legitimist leaders. Those meetings were a secret to no one. The names of the new Bonchamps and Elbées, who were to put themselves at the head of this last Vendéan struggle, were well-known and noted; the organizations of the former period into "parishes," "captaincies," and "divisions," were renewed; the priests refused to chant the Domine salvum fac regem Philippum, commending to the prayers of their people Henri V., king of France, and Marie-Caroline, regent. In short, in all the departments bordering on the Loire, particularly those of the Lower Loire and of the Maine-et-Loire, the air was filled with that smell of powder which precedes, as a general thing, all great political convulsions.

In spite of this wide-spread fermentation,--perhaps in consequence of it,--the fair at Montaigu promised to be very brilliant. Although it was usually of small importance, the influx of peasants on this occasion was considerable. The men from the high lands of Mauges and Retz rubbed shoulders with those from the Bocage and the plain; and the warlike inclination of all these country-folk was manifested by the prevalence of broad-brimmed hats and long-haired heads, and the absence of caps. In fact, the women, who were usually the majority in these commercial assemblies, did not come, on this occasion, to the Montaigu fair.

Moreover,--and this alone would have sufficed to show the incipient state of things to the least observing person,--though customers were plentiful at the fair of Montaigu, horses, cows, sheep, butter, and corn, which constituted the ordinary traffic, were conspicuously absent. The peasants, whether they came from Beaupréau, Mortagne, Bressuire, Saint-Fulgent, or Machecoul, carried in place of their usual marketable produce nothing but stout cudgels of dogwood tipped with iron, and by the way they grasped them it was plain enough that they meant to do business of that kind.

The market-place and the main (and only) street in Montaigu, which were used as

the fairground, had a serious, almost threatening, and certainly solemn aspect, which is not usual in such assemblages. A few jugglers, a few vendors of quack medicines, a few teeth-pullers tapped their boxes, blew their bugles, clanged their gongs, and vaunted their trades facetiously to no purpose; frowns continued on the anxious faces that passed them by without deigning to listen to their music or their chatter.

The people of La Vendée, like their neighbors of the North, the Bretons, talk but little. On this occasion they talked less than ever. Most of them stood with their backs against the houses or the garden walls or the wooden bars that inclosed the market-place, and there they stood, motionless, their legs crossed, their heads under their broad hats inclining forward, and their hands leaning on their sticks, like so many statues. Some were gathered in little groups, and these groups, which seemed to be awaiting something, were, strange to say, as silent as the solitary individuals.

The crowds were great in the drinking-shops. Cider, brandy, and coffee were dispensed there in vast quantities; but the constitution of the Vendéan peasant is so robust that the enormous quantities of liquor absorbed had no visible influence on the faces and conduct of any of them. Their color might be a little higher, their eyes more brilliant, but the men were masters of themselves, and all the more so because they distrusted those who kept the wineshops, and the village folk whom they met there. In the towns and villages along the great high-roads of La Vendée and Brittany the minds of the inhabitants were, as a general thing, awakened to ideas of progress and liberty; but these sentiments, which cooled at a little distance, disappeared altogether when the interior country districts were reached.

Consequently, all the inhabitants of the chief centres of population, unless they had given unequivocal proofs of devotion to the royal cause, were classed as "patriots" by the peasantry; and patriots were to the peasants enemies, to whom they attributed all the evils resulting from the great insurrection, hating them with that deep, undying hatred which characterizes civil and religious warfare.

In coming to the fair at Montaigu--a centre of population, and occupied at this time by a company of some hundred or so of Mobile guards--the inhabitants of the country districts had penetrated to the very centre of their enemies. They understood this thoroughly, and that is why they maintained under a pacific demeanor the reserve and vigilance of soldiers under arms.

Only one of the numerous drinking-shops of Montaigu was kept by a man on whom the Vendéans could rely, and before whom, consequently, they discarded all constraint. His tavern was in the centre of the town, on the fairground itself, at the corner of the market-place and a side alley leading, not to another street nor to the fields, but to the river Maine, which skirts the town to the southeast.

The tavern had no sign. A branch of dry holly, stuck horizontally into a crack of the wall, and a few apples, seen through window-panes so covered with dust that no curtain was needed, informed all strangers of the nature of the establishment. As for its regular customers, they needed no indications.

The proprietor of this tavern was named Aubin Courte-Joie. Aubin was his family name; Courte-Joie was a nickname, which he owed to the jeering propensities of his friends. He came by it in this way. The part, insignificant as it is, which Aubin Courte-Joie plays in this history obliges us to say a word on his antecedents.

At twenty years of age Aubin was so frail, debilitated, and sickly, that even the conscription, which did not look very closely into such matters, rejected him as unfit for the favors which his Imperial and Royal Majesty bestowed upon his conscripts. But in 1814 this same conscription, having then aged by two years, was less fastidious, and came to the conclusion that what it had so far considered an abortion was at any rate a numerical figure, somewhere between a one and a nought, and could, if only on paper, contribute to the terrifying of the kings of Europe. Consequently, the conscription laid hands on Aubin.

But Aubin, whom the original disdain manifested by the authorities toward his

person had alienated from all desire for military glory, resolved to desert the government, and taking to flight he connected himself with one of those bands of refractories (as recalcitrant conscripts were then called) who roamed the interior of the country. The less plentiful recruits became, the more pitiless grew the agents of imperial authority.

Aubin, whom Nature had not endowed with excessive conceit, would never have thought himself so necessary to the government if he had not seen with his own eyes the trouble that the government took to hunt for him through the forests of Brittany and the bogs of La Vendée. The gendarmes were active in their pursuit of refractories.

In one of the encounters that resulted from this pursuit, Aubin had used his gun with a courage and tenacity which proved that the conscription of 1814 was not altogether wrong in wishing to lay hands on him as one of its elect,--in one of these encounters, we were about to say, Aubin was hit by a ball and left for dead in the roadway.

On that day a bourgeoise of Ancenis took the road by the river bank, which leads from Ancenis to Nantes. She was in her carriole, and it might be about eight or nine o'clock at night; at any rate, it was dusk. When she came to the body the horse shuddered in the shafts and refused to go on. She whipped him, he reared. On further whipping, the animal tried to turn short round and go back to Ancenis. His mistress, who had never known him to behave in that way before, got out of her carriole. All was then explained. Aubin's body lay across the road.

Such encounters were not infrequent in those days. The bourgeoise was only slightly alarmed. She fastened her horse to a tree, and began to drag Aubin's body into the ditch, to make room for her vehicle and others that might pass that way. But she had no sooner touched the body than she found it warm. The motion she gave to it, perhaps the pain of the motion, brought Aubin to his senses; he gave a sigh and

moved his arms.

The end of it was that, instead of putting him into the ditch, the bourgeoise put him into her carriole; and instead of continuing her way to Nantes she returned to Ancenis. The good dame was pious and a royalist. The cause for which Aubin was wounded, the scapulary she found on his breast, interested her deeply. She sent for a surgeon. The luckless Aubin had both legs fractured by one shot; it was necessary to amputate them. The worthy woman nursed him and took care of him with all the devotion of a sister of charity. Her good deed, as often happens, attached her to the object of it, and when Aubin was once more well in health it was with the utmost astonishment that he received an offer of her heart and hand. Needless to say that Aubin accepted.

Thenceforth Aubin became, to the stupefaction of all the country round one of the small proprietors of the canton. But, alas! his joy was of short duration. His wife died within a year, She had taken the precaution to make a will, leaving him all her property; but her natural heirs attacked it for some error of form, and the court at Nantes having decided in their favor, the poor ex-recruit was no better off than before his luck happened to him. It was in reference to the short duration of his opulence that the inhabitants of Montaigu, who were not, as will be imagined, without envy at his rise or rejoicing at his fall, bestowed upon him the significant addition of Courte-Joie (Short-Joy) to his proper name.

Now, the heirs who had managed to set aside the will belonged to the liberal party. Aubin could not, therefore, do less than vent upon that party in general the anger that the loss of his property excited in him. He did so, and he did it conscientiously. Soured by his infirmities, embittered by what seemed to him a horrible injustice, Aubin Courte-Joie felt to all those whom he blamed for his fortunes--judges, patriots, and adversaries--a savage hatred. Public events had encouraged this hatred, and it was now awaiting a favorable moment to convert itself into deeds which the

sullen and vindictive nature of the man would undoubtedly render terrible.

With his twofold infirmity it was impossible for Aubin to go back to his old life and become a farmer and tiller of the ground like his father and grandfather before him. He was compelled, therefore, much against his will, to live in a town. Gathering up the fragments of his lost opulence he came to live in the midst of those he hated most, at Montaigu itself, where he kept the tavern in which we find him eighteen years after the events we have just recorded.

In 1832 there was not in all La Vendée a more enthusiastic adherent to royalist opinions than Aubin Courte-Joie. In serving that cause was he not fulfilling a personal vengeance? Aubin Courte-Joie was, in spite of his two wooden legs, the most active and intelligent agent in the uprising which was now being organized. Standing sentinel in the midst of the enemy's camp, he kept the Vendéan leaders informed of all the government preparations for defence, not only in the canton of Montaigu, but also throughout the adjoining districts.

The tramps who roamed the country--those customers of a day, whom other tavern-keepers considered of no profit and paid no heed to--were in his hands marvellous auxiliaries, whom he kept employed in a circuit of thirty miles. He used them as spies, and also as messengers to and from the inhabitants of the country districts. His tavern was the rendezvous of all those who were distinctively called Chouans. It was the only one, as we have said, where they were not obliged to repress their royalist sentiments.

On the day of the fair at Montaigu Aubin Courte-Joie's drinking-shop did not at first sight seem so full of customers as might have been expected from the great influx of country people. In the first of the two rooms, a dark and gloomy apartment, furnished with an unpolished wooden counter and a few benches and stools, not more than a dozen peasants were assembled. By the cleanliness, we might say the nicety of their clothes, it was plain that these peasants belonged to the upper class of

farmers.

This first room was separated from the second by a glass partition, behind which was a cotton curtain with large red and white squares. The second room served as kitchen, dining-room, bedroom, and office, becoming also, on great occasions an annex to the common hall; it was where Aubin Courte-Joie received his special friends.

The furniture of this room showed its quintuple service. At the farther end was a very low bed, with a tester and curtains of green serge; this was evidently the couch of the legless proprietor. It was flanked by two huge hogsheads, from which brandy and cider were drawn on demand of customers. To right, on entering, was the fireplace, with a wide, high chimney-piece like those of cottages. In the middle of the room was an oak table with wooden benches on each side of it. Opposite to the fireplace stood a dresser with crockery and tin utensils. A crucifix surmounted by a branch of consecrated holly, a few wax figurines of a devotional character coarsely colored, constituted the decoration of the apartment.

On this occasion Aubin Courte-Joie had admitted to this sanctuary a number of his numerous friends. In the outer room there were, as we have said, not more than a dozen; but at least a score were in the second. Most of these were sitting round the table drinking and talking with great animation. Three or four were emptying great bags piled up in one corner of the room and containing large, round sea-biscuits; these they counted and put in baskets, giving the baskets to tramps or women who stood by an outer door in the corner of the room behind the cider cask. This door opened upon a little courtyard, which itself opened into the alley-way leading to the river, which we have already mentioned.

Aubin Courte-Joie was seated in a sort of arm-chair under the mantel-shelf of the chimney. Beside him was a man wearing a goatskin garment and a black woollen cap, in whom we may recognize our old friend Jean Oullier, with his dog lying at his

feet between his legs. Behind them Courte-Joie's niece, a young and handsome peasant girl, whom the tavern-keeper had taken to do the serving of his business, was stirring the fire and watching some dozen brown cups in which was gently simmering in the heat from the hearth what the peasants call "a roast of cider."

Aubin Courte-Joie was talking eagerly in a low voice to Jean Oullier, when a slight whistle, like the frightened cry of a partridge, came from the outer room.

"Who came in?" said Courte-Joie, looking through a peephole he had made in the curtain. "The man from La Logerie. Attention!"

Even before this order was given to those whom it concerned, all was still and orderly in Courte-Joie's sanctum. The outer door was gently closed; the women and the tramps disappeared; the men who were counting the biscuits had closed and turned over their sacks, and were sitting on them, and smoking their pipes in an easy attitude. As for the men drinking at the table, three or four had suddenly gone to sleep as if by enchantment. Jean Oullier turned round toward the hearth, thus concealing his face from the first glance of any one entering the apartment.

XVIII.

THE MAN FROM LA LOGERIE.

Courtin,--for it was he whom Courte-Joie designated as the man from La Logerie,--Courtin had entered the outer room. Except for the little cry of warning, so well imitated that it was really like the cry of a frightened partridge, no one appeared to take any notice of his presence. The men who were drinking continued their talk, although, serious as their manner was when Courtin entered, it now became suddenly very gay and noisy.

The farmer looked about him, but evidently did not find in the first room the person he wanted, for he resolutely opened the door of the glass partition and showed his sneaking face on the threshold of the inner room. There again, no one seemed to

notice him. Mariette alone, Aubin Courte-Joie's niece, who was waiting on the customers, withdrew her attention from the cider cups, and looking at Courtin said, as she would have done to any of her uncle's guests:--

"What shall I bring you, Monsieur Courtin?"

"Coffee," replied Courtin, inspecting the faces that were round the table and in the corners of the room.

"Very good; sit down," said Mariette. "I'll bring it to your seat presently."

"That's not worth while," replied Courtin, good-humoredly; "pour it out now. I'll drink it here in the chimney-corner with the friends."

No one seemed to object to this qualification; but neither did any one stir to make room for him. Courtin was therefore obliged to make further advances.

"Are you well, gars Aubin?" he asked, addressing the tavern-keeper.

"As you see," replied the latter, without turning his head.

It was obvious to Courtin that he was not received with much good-will; but he was not a man to disconcert himself for a trifle like that.

"Here, Mariette," said he, "give me a stool, that I may sit down near your uncle."

"There are no stools left, Maître Courtin," replied the girl. "I should think your eyes were good enough to see that."

"Well, then, your uncle will give me his," continued Courtin, with audacious familiarity, though at heart he felt little encouraged by the behavior of the landlord and his customers.

"If you will have it," grumbled Aubin Courte-Joie, "you must, being as how I am master of the house, and it shall never be said that any man was refused a seat at the Holly Branch when he wanted to sit down."

"Then give me your stool, as you say, smooth-tongue, for there's the very man I'm after, right next to you."

"Who's that?" said Aubin, rising; and instantly a dozen other stools were offered.

"Jean Oullier," replied Courtin; "and it's my belief that here he is."

Hearing his name, Jean Oullier rose and said, in a tone that was almost menacing:--

"What do you want with me?"

"Well, well! you needn't eat me up because I want to see you," replied the mayor of la Logerie. "What I have to say is of more importance to you than it is to me."

"Maître Courtin," said Jean Oullier, in a grave tone, "whatever you may choose to pretend, we are not friends; and what's more, you know it so well that you have not come here with any good intentions."

"Well, you are mistaken, gars Oullier."

"Maître Courtin," continued Jean Oullier, paying no attention to the signs which Aubin Courte-Joie made, exhorting him to prudence, "Maître Courtin, ever since we have known each other you have been a Blue, and you bought bad property."

"Bad property!" exclaimed Courtin, with his jeering smile.

"Oh! I know what I mean, and so do you. I mean ill-gotten property. You've been hand and glove with the curs of the towns; you have persecuted the peasantry and the villagers,--those who have kept their faith in God and the king. What is there in common between you, who have done all that, and me, who have done just the reverse?"

"True," replied Courtin, "true, gars Oullier, I have not navigated in your waters; but, for all that, I say that neighbors ought not to wish the death of each other. I have come in search of you to do you a service; I'll swear to that."

"I don't want your services, Maître Courtin," replied Jean Oullier.

"Why not?" persisted the farmer.

"Because I am certain they hide some treachery."

"So you refuse to listen to me?"

"I refuse," replied the huntsman, roughly.

"You are wrong," said Aubin Courte-Joie, in a low voice; for he thought the frank, outspoken rudeness of his friend a mistaken man[oe]uvre.

"Very good," said Courtin; "then remember this. If harm comes to the inhabitants of the château de Souday, you have nobody to thank but yourself, gars Oullier."

There was evidently some special meaning in Courtin's manner of saying the word "inhabitants;" "inhabitants" of course included guests. Jean Oullier could not mistake this meaning, and in spite of his habitual self-command he turned pale. He regretted he had been so decided, but it was dangerous now to retrace his steps. If Courtin had suspicions, such a retreat would confirm them. He therefore did his best to master his emotion, and sat down again, turning his back on Courtin with an indifferent air; in fact, his manner was so careless that Courtin, sly dog as he was, was taken in by it. He did not leave the tavern as hastily as might have been expected after delivering his warning threat; on the contrary, he searched his pockets a long time to find enough change to pay for his coffee. Aubin Courte-Joie understood the meaning of this by-play, and profited by Courtin's lingering to put in a word himself.

"My good Jean," he said, addressing Jean Oullier in a hearty way, "we have long been friends, and have followed the same road for many years, I hope--here are two wooden legs that prove it. Well, I am not afraid to say to you, before Monsieur Courtin, that you are wrong, don't you see, wrong! So long as a hand is closed none but a fool will say, 'I know what is in it.' It is true that Monsieur Courtin" (Aubin Courte-Joie punctiliously gave that title to the mayor of la Logerie) "has never been one of us; but neither has he been against us. He has been for himself, and that is all the blame we can put upon him. But nowadays, when quarrels are over and there are neither Blues nor Chouans any more, to-day when, thank God, there's peace in the land, what does the color of his cockade signify to you? Faith! if Monsieur Courtin

has, as he says, something useful to tell you it seems to me a pity not to hear it."

Jean Oullier shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Old fox!" thought Courtin, who was far too well informed as to the real state of things to be taken in by the pacific flowers of rhetoric with which Aubin Courte-Joie thought proper to wreathe his remarks. But aloud he said, "All the more because what I have to say has nothing to do with politics."

"There! you see," said Courte-Joie, "there is no reason why you should not talk with the mayor. Come, come, sit down here and have a talk with him at your ease."

All this made no difference in Jean Oullier, who was neither mollified toward Courtin, nor did he even turn his head; only, when the mayor sat down beside him he did not get up and walk away, as might have been expected.

"Gars Oullier," said Courtin, by way of preamble, "I think talks are all the better for being moistened. 'Wine is the honey of words,' as our vicar says,--not in his sermons, but that don't make it less true. If we drink a bottle together perhaps that will sweeten our ideas."

"As you please," replied Jean Oullier, who, while feeling the strongest repugnance to hob-nob with Courtin, regarded the sacrifice as necessary to the cause he had at heart.

"Have you any wine?" said Courtin to Mariette.

"What a question!" she exclaimed. "Have we any wine, indeed! I should think so!"

"Good wine, I mean; sealed bottles."

"Sealed bottles, yes," said Mariette, proudly; "but they cost forty sous each."

"Pooh!" said Aubin, who had seated himself in the other chimney-corner to catch, if he could, some scraps of the promised communication, "the mayor is a man who has got the wherewithal, my girl, and forty sous won't prevent his paying his rent to Madame la Baronne Michel."

Courtin regretted his show of liberality; if the days of the old war were really coming back it might be dangerous to pass for rich.

"Wherewithal!" he exclaimed; "how you talk, gars Aubin! Yes, certainly, I have enough to pay my rent, but that paid I consider myself a lucky man if I can make both ends meet; that's my wealth!"

"Whether you are rich or poor is none of our business," remarked Jean Oullier. "Come, what have you to say to me? Make haste."

Courtin took the bottle which Mariette now brought him, wiped the neck of it carefully with his sleeve, poured a few drops into his own glass, filled that of Jean Oullier, then his own, touched glasses, and slowly emptied his.

"No one is to be pitied," he said, smacking his lips, "if they can drink such wine as that every day."

"Especially if they drink it with a clear conscience," added Jean Oullier. "In my opinion that's what makes wine taste good."

"Jean Oullier," said Courtin, without noticing the philosophical reflection of his companion, "you bear me ill-will, and you are wrong. On my word of honor, you are wrong."

"Prove it, and I'll believe you. That's all the confidence I have in you."

"I don't wish you harm; I wish good for myself, as Aubin Courte-Joie, who is a man of judgment, said just now; but you don't call that a crime, I hope. I mind my own little matters without meddling much in other people's business, because, as I say to myself, 'My good fellow, if at Easter or Christmas you haven't got your money ready in your pouch the king, be he Henri V. or Louis Philippe, will send the Treasury after you, and you'll get a paper in his name, which may be an honor, but it will cost you dear.' You reason differently; that's your affair. I don't blame you,--at the most I only pity you."

"Keep your pity for others, Maître Courtin," replied Jean Oullier, haughtily; "I don't want it any more than I want your confidences."

"When I say I pity you, gars Oullier, I mean your master as well as yourself. Monsieur le marquis is a man I respect. He fought through the great war. Well, what did he gain by it?"

"Maître Courtin, you said you were not going to talk politics, and you are breaking your word."

"Yes, I did say so, that's true; but it is not my fault if in this devilish country politics are so twisted in with everybody's business that the one can't be separated from the other. As I was saying, gars Oullier, Monsieur le marquis is a man I respect, and I am very sorry, very sorry indeed, to see him ridden over by a lot of common rich folks,--he who used to be the first in the province."

"If he is satisfied with his lot why need you care?" replied Jean Oullier. "You never heard him complain; he has never borrowed money of you."

"What would you say to a man who offered to restore to the château de Souday all the wealth and consideration it has lost? Come," continued Courtin, not hindered by the coldness of the Chouan, "do you think that a man who is ready to do that can be your enemy? Don't you think, on the contrary, that Monsieur le marquis would owe him a debt of gratitude? There, now, answer that question squarely and honestly, as I have spoken to you."

"Of course he would, if the man you speak of did what you say by honest means; but I doubt it."

"Honest means! Would any one dare propose to you any that were not honest? See here, my gars! I'll out with it at once, and not take all day and many words to say it. I can,--yes, I, who speak to you,--I can make the money flow into the château de Souday, as it hasn't done of late years; only--"

"Only--yes, that's it; only what? Ha! that's where the collar galls."

"Only, I was going to say, I must get my profit out of it."

"If the matter is an honest one, that's only fair; you will certainly get your part."

"That's all I want to know to set the wheel in motion,--and it's little enough, too."

"Yes; but what is it you are after? What is it you ask?" returned Jean Oullier, now very curious to know what was in Courtin's head.

"Oh! it is just as simple as nothing. In the first place, I want it so arranged that I needn't renew my lease or have any rent to pay for twelve years to come on the farm I occupy."

"In other words, you want a present?"

"If Monsieur de Souday offers it I shall not refuse, you understand. Of course I shouldn't be such a fool as to stand in my own light."

"But how can it be arranged? Your farm belongs to young Michel or his mother. I have not heard that they want to sell it. How can any man give you that which he doesn't possess?"

"Oh!" said Courtin, "if I interfere in the matter I speak of perhaps that farm may soon belong to some of you, and then it would be easy enough. What do you say?"

"I say I don't understand what you are talking about, Maître Courtin."

"Nonsense! Ha, ha! but it isn't a bad match for our young man. Don't you know that besides La Logerie he owns the estate of la Coudraie, the mills at La Ferronnerie, the woods of Gervaise, all of which bring in, one year with another, a pretty sum of money? And I can tell you this, the old baroness has laid by as much more, which he will get at her death."

"What has that Michel youth to do with the Marquis de Souday? they have nothing in common," said Jean Oullier. "And why should the property of your master be of any interest to mine?"

"Come, come, let's play above-board, gars Oullier. Damn it! you must have seen that

our young man is sweet upon one of your young ladies, very sweet, indeed! Which of them it is, I can't tell you; but let Monsieur le marquis just say the word and sign me a paper about that farm, and the minute the girl, whichever it is, is married,--they are as smart as flies, those two,--she can manage her husband as she likes and get all she wants. He'll never refuse her a few acres of ground, especially when she wants to give them to a man to whom he'll be grateful, too. In this way I kill two birds with one stone, do your business and my own too. There is but one obstacle, and that's the mother. Well," added Courtin, leaning close to Oullier's ear, "I'll undertake to get rid of that."

Jean Oullier made no answer; but he looked fixedly at his companion.

"Yes," continued the latter, "if everybody wishes it, Madame la baronne won't be able to refuse it. I'll tell you this, Oullier," added Courtin, striking the other familiarly on the knee, "I know the whole story of Monsieur Michel."

"Why should you want our help, then? What hinders you from getting all you want out of her without delay?"

"What hinders me is this: I want to add to the word of a youth who, while keeping his sheep, heard a treacherous bargain made,--I want to add to his word the testimony of the man who was in the woods of La Chabotière some forty years ago, and saw the price of that bloody and treacherous bargain paid. You know best who saw that sight and who can give that testimony, gars Oullier. If you and I make common cause, the baroness will be as supple as a handful of flax. She is miserly, but she is also proud; the fear of public dishonor and the gossip of the neighborhood will make her docile enough. She'll see that, after all, Mademoiselle de Souday, poor and illegitimate as she is, is more than a match for the son of Baron Michel, whose grandfather was a peasant like ourselves, and whose father the baron was--you know what. Enough! Your young lady will be rich, our young man will be happy, and I shall be very glad. What objection can be offered to all that?--not to speak of our

becoming friends, gars Oullier; and I think my friendship is worth something to you, I must say."

"Your friendship?" replied Jean Oullier, who had repressed with great difficulty the indignation he felt at the singular proposal that Courtin had just made to him.

"Yes, my friendship," returned the latter. "You needn't shake your head like that. I have told you that I know more than any man about the life of Baron Michel; I will add that I know more than any man but one about his death. I was one of the beaters of the drive at which he was killed, and my post placed me just opposite to him. I was young, and even then I had a habit (which God preserve to me) of not gabbling unless it were my interest to do so. Now, then, do you think my services to your party of no account if my interests take me over to your side?"

"Maître Courtin," replied Jean Oullier, frowning, "I have no influence on the plans and determinations of the Marquis de Souday, but if I had any at all, even the smallest, never should that farm of yours come into the family; and if it did come in, never should it serve as the price of treachery."

"Fine words, all that!" exclaimed Courtin.

"No; poor as the Demoiselles de Souday may be, never do I want either of them to marry the young man you speak of. Rich as he may be, and even if he bore another name than he does, no Demoiselle de Souday could buy her marriage by a base act."

"You call that a base act, do you? I call it a good stroke of business."

"It may be so for you; but for those I serve, a marriage with Monsieur Michel, bought through you, would be more than a base act; it would be an infamy."

"Take care, Jean Oullier. I want to act a kind part, and I won't let myself quarrel with the label you choose to stick upon my acts. I came here with good intentions; it is for you not to let me leave this place with bad ones."

"I care as little for your threats as I do for your our proposals, Courtin; remember

that. But if you force me to repeat it I shall say it to the end of time."

"Once more, Jean Oullier, listen to me. I will admit to you that I want to be rich. That is my whim, just as it is yours to be faithful as a dog to folks who don't care more for you than you do for your terrier. I thought I could be useful to your master, and I hoped he would not let my services go without reward. You say it is impossible. Then we'll say no more about it. But if the nobles whom you serve wished to show their gratitude to me in the way I ask I would rather do a service to them than to others; and I desire to tell you so once more."

"Because you think that nobles would pay more for it than others. Isn't that it?"

"Undoubtedly, gars Oullier. I don't conceal anything from you, and I'll repeat that, as you say, to the end of time."

"I shall not make myself the go-between in any such bargain, Maître Courtin. Besides, I have no power in the matter, and anything I could do for you is so small it isn't worth talking about."

"Hey, how do you know that? You didn't know, my gars, that I knew all about what happened in the wood at Chabotière. Perhaps I could astonish you if I told you all I know."

Jean Oullier was afraid of appearing afraid.

"Come," said he, "enough of this. If you want to sell yourself apply to others. Such bargains are hateful to me, even if I had any means of making them. They don't concern me, God be thanked."

"Is that your last word, Jean Oullier?"

"My first and my last. Go your ways, Maître Courtin, and leave me to mine."

"So much the worse for you," said Courtin, rising; "but, on my word, I would gladly have gone your way."

So saying, he nodded to Jean Oullier and went out. He had hardly crossed the

threshold before Aubin Courte-Joie, stumping along on his wooden legs, came close to Jean Oullier.

"You have done a foolish thing," he whispered.

"What ought I to have done?"

"Taken him to Louis Renaud or to Gaspard; they would have bought him."

"Him,--that wicked traitor?"

"My good Jean, in 1815, when I was mayor, I went to Nantes, and there I saw a man named ----, who was, or had been, a minister; and I heard him say two things I have always remembered. One was that traitors make and unmake empires; the other was that treachery is the only thing in this world that is not to be measured by the size of him who makes it."

"What do you advise me to do now?"

"Follow and watch him."

Jean Oullier reflected a moment. Then he rose.

"I think you are right," he said.

And he went out anxiously.

XIX.

THE FAIR AT MONTAIGU.

The effervescent state of minds in the west of France did not take the government unawares. Political faith had grown too lukewarm to allow a probable uprising, covering so large an extent of territory and involving so many conspirators, to remain long a secret.

Some time before Madame's arrival off the coast of Provence the authorities in Paris knew of the projected scheme, and repressive measures both prompt and vigorous had been arranged. No sooner was it evident that the princess was making her way

to the western provinces than it was only a question of carrying out those measures and of putting the execution of them into safe and able hands.

The departments whose uprising was expected were divided into as many military districts as there were sub-prefectures. Each of these arrondissements, commanded by a chief of battalion, was the centre of several secondary cantonments commanded by captains, around which several minor detachments were encamped under command of lieutenants and sub-lieutenants, serving as guards and outposts into the interior districts as far as the safety of communications would permit.

Montaigu, in the arrondissement of Clisson, had its garrison, which consisted of a company of the 32d regiment of the line. The day on which the events we have now related occurred this garrison had been reinforced by two brigades of gendarmerie, which had reached Nantes that morning, and about a score of mounted chasseurs. The chasseurs were serving as escort to a general officer from the garrison at Nantes, who was on a tour of inspection of the various detachments. This was General Dermoncourt.

The inspection of the Montaigu garrison was over. Dermoncourt, a veteran as intelligent as he was energetic, thought it would not be out of place to inspect those whom he called his old Vendéan friends, now swarming into the streets and market-place of the town. He accordingly took off his uniform, put on citizen's clothes, and mingled with the crowds, accompanied by a member of the civil administration who happened to be at Montaigu at that moment.

The general bearing of the population though lowering was calm. The crowd opened to allow passage to the two gentlemen, and, although the martial carriage of the general, his heavy moustache, black, in spite of his sixty years, his scarred face, and the self-sufficient air of his companion, excited the inquisitive curiosity of the multitude, no hostile demonstration was made to them.

"Well, well," said the general, "my old friends the Vendéans are not much changed.

I find them as uncommunicative as I left them thirty-eight years ago."

"To me such indifference seems a favorable sign," said the civil administrator, in a pompous tone. "The two months I have just passed in Paris, where there was a riot every day, gave me an experience in such matters, and I think I may safely assert that these people here show no signs of insurrection. Remark, general, that there are no knots of talkers, no orators in full blast, no animation, no mutterings; all is perfectly quiet. Come, come! these people are here for their business only, and have no thought of anything else, I'll answer for it."

"You are quite right, my dear sir; I am wholly of your mind. These worthy people, as you say, are thinking of absolutely nothing but their business; but that business is to distribute to the best advantage the leaden balls and the sabre-blades they keep hidden away out of sight, which they intend to bestow upon us as soon as possible."

"Do you really think so?"

"I don't think so, I am sure of it. If the religious element were not, fortunately for us, absent from this new uprising, a fact which makes me think it may not be general, I should confidently assure you that there is not one of those fellows you see over there in serge jackets and linen breeches and wooden shoes but has his post and rank and number in battalions raised by Messieurs the nobles."

"What! those tramps and beggars too?"

"Yes, those tramps and beggars especially. What characterizes this warfare, my good sir, is the fact that we have to do with an enemy who is everywhere and nowhere. You know he is there; you seek for him, and you find only a peasant like those about us, who bows to you, a beggar who holds out his hand, a pedler who offers his merchandise, a musician who rasps your ears with his hurdy-gurdy, a quack who vaunts his medicine, a little shepherd who smiles at you, a woman suckling her child on the threshold of her cottage, a harmless furze-bush growing beside the road. You pass them all without the slightest feeling of distrust, and yet, peasant, shepherd,

beggar, musician, pedler, quack, and woman are the enemy. Even the furze-bush is in league with them. Some, creeping through the gorse, will follow you like your shadow,--indefatigable spies that they are!--and at the first alarming man[oe]uvre on your part, those you are tracking are warned long before you are able to surprise them. Others will have picked up from the hedges and ditches and furrows their rusty guns concealed among the reeds or the long grass, and if you are worth the trouble, they will follow you, as the others did, from bush to bush and cover to cover, till they find some favorable opportunity for a sure aim. They are saving with their powder. The furze-bush will send you a shot, and if by chance it misses you, and you are able to examine the covert, you'll find nothing there but a tangle of branches, thorns, and leaves. That's what it is to be inoffensive in these regions, my good sir."

"Are not you exaggerating, general?" said the civil officer, with a doubting air.

"Heavens and earth, Monsieur le sous-préfet! perhaps you'll come to know it by experience. Here we are in the midst of an apparently pacific crowd. We have, you say, nothing but friends about us, Frenchmen, compatriots; well, just arrest one of those fellows--"

"What would happen if I arrested him?"

"It would happen that some one of the rest,--perhaps that young gars in a white smock, perhaps this beggar who is eating with such an appetite on the sill of that doorway, who may be, for all we know, Diot Jambe-d'Argent, or Bras-de-fer, or any other leader of the band,--will rise and make a sign. At that sign a dozen or more sticks, now peacefully carried about, will be down on our heads, and before my escort could get to our assistance we should be as flat as wheat beneath the sickle. You are not convinced? Then suppose you make the attempt."

"No, no; I believe you, general," cried the sub-prefect, eagerly. "The devil! all this is no joke. Ever since you have been enlightening me I fancy I see the scowls on their

faces; they look like scoundrels."

"Not a bit of it! They are worthy people, very worthy fellows; only, you must know how to take them; and, unluckily, that is not always the case with those who are sent to manage them," said the general, with a sarcastic smile. "Do you want a specimen of their conversation? You are, or you have been, or you ought to have been a lawyer; but I'll bet you never met in all your experience of the profession fellows as clever at talking without saying anything as these Vendéan peasants. Hey, gars!" continued the general, addressing a peasant between thirty-five and forty years old, who was hovering about them, and examining, apparently with curiosity, a biscuit which he held in his hand,--"Hey, gars, show me where those good biscuits are sold; they look to me very tempting."

"They are not sold, monsieur; they are given away."

"Bless me! Well, I want one."

"It is curious," said the peasant, "very curious that good white wheat biscuits should be given away, when they might so easily be sold."

"Yes, very singular; but what is still more singular is that the first individual I happen to address not only answers my question, but anticipates those I might ask him. Show me that biscuit, my good man."

The general examined the article which the peasant handed to him. It was a plain biscuit made of flour and milk, on which, before it was baked, a cross and four parallel bars had been marked with a knife.

"The devil! Well! a present that is amusing as well as useful is good to get. There must be a riddle of some kind in those marks. Who gave you that biscuit, my good friend?"

"No one; they don't trust me."

"Ah! then you are a patriot?"

"I am mayor of my district, and I hold by the government. I saw a woman giving a lot of these biscuit to men from Machecoul, without their asking for them and without their giving her anything in return. So then I offered to buy one, and she dared not refuse. I bought two. I ate one before her, and the other, this one, I slipped into my pocket."

"Will you let me have it? I am making a collection of rebuses, and this one seems interesting."

"I will give it or sell it, as you please."

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Dermoncourt, looking at the man with more attention than he had paid to him hitherto, "I think I understand you. You can explain these hieroglyphics?"

"Perhaps; at any rate, I can give you other information that is not to be despised."

"And you wish to be paid for it?"

"Of course I do," replied the peasant, boldly.

"That is how you serve the government which made you mayor?"

"The devil! Has the government put a tiled roof on my house? No! Has it changed the mud walls to stone? No! My house is thatched with straw and built of wood and mud. The Chouans could set fire to it in a minute, and it would burn to ashes. Whoso risks much ought to earn much; for, as you see, I might lose my all in a single night."

"You are right. Come, Monsieur le sous-préfet, this belongs to your department. Thank God, I'm only a soldier, and my supplies are paid for before delivery. Pay this man and hand his information over to me."

"And do it quickly," said the farmer, "for we are watched on all sides."

The peasants had, in fact, drawn nearer and nearer to the little group. Without, apparently, any other motive than the curiosity which all strangers in a country place

naturally excite, they had formed a tolerably compact circle round the three speakers. The general took notice of it.

"My dear fellow," he said aloud, addressing the sub-prefect, "I wouldn't rely on that man's word, if I were you. He offers to sell you two hundred sacks of oats at nineteen francs the sack, but it remains to be seen when he will deliver them. Give him a small sum down and make him sign a promise of delivery."

"But I have neither paper nor pencil," said the sub-prefect, understanding the general's meaning.

"Go to the hotel, hang it! Come," said the general, looking about him, "are there any others here who have oats to sell? We have horses to feed."

One peasant answered in the affirmative, and while the general was discussing the price with him the sub-prefect and the man with the biscuit slipped away, almost unnoticed. The man, as our readers are of course aware, was no other than Courtin. Let us now try to explain the man[oe]uvres which Courtin had executed since morning. After his interview with Michel, Courtin had reflected long. It seemed to him that a plain and simple denunciation of the visitors at the château de Sunday was not the course most profitable to his interests. It might very well be that the government would leave its subordinate agents without reward, in which case the act was dangerous and without profit; for, of course, Courtin would draw down upon him the enmity of the royalists, who were the majority of the canton. It was then that he thought of the little scheme we heard him propound to Jean Oullier. He hoped by assisting the loves of the young baron to draw a pretty penny to himself, to win the good will of the marquis, whose ambition must be, as he thought, to obtain such a marriage for his daughter, and, finally, to sell at a great price his silence as to the presence of a personage whose safety, if he were not mistaken, was of the utmost consequence to the royalist party.

We have seen how Jean Oullier received his advances. It was then that Courtin,

considering himself to have failed in what he regarded as an excellent scheme, decided on contenting himself with a lesser, and made the move we have now related toward the government.

XX.

THE OUTBREAK.

Half an hour after the conference of the sub-prefect and Courtin a gendarme was making his way among the groups, looking for the general, whom he found talking very amicably with a respectable old beggar in rags. The gendarme said a word in the general's ear, and the latter at once made his way to the little inn of the Cheval Blanc. The sub-prefect stood in the doorway.

"Well?" asked the general, noticing the highly satisfied look on the face of the public functionary.

"Ah, general! great news and good news!" replied the sub-prefect.

"Let's hear it."

"The man I've had to deal with is really very clever."

"Fine news, indeed! they are all very clever. The greatest fool among them could give points to Monsieur de Talleyrand. What has he told you, this clever man?"

"He saw the Comte de Bonneville, disguised as a peasant, enter the château de Souday last night, and with the count was another little peasant, whom he thinks was a woman--"

"What next?"

"Next! why there's no doubt, general."

"Go on, monsieur; I am all impatience," said the general, in the calmest tone.

"I mean to say that in my opinion the woman is no other than the one we have been told to look out for,--namely, the princess."

"There may be no doubt for you; there are a dozen doubts for me."

"Why so, general?"

"Because I, too, have had some confidences."

"Voluntary or involuntary?"

"Who knows, with these people?"

"Pooh! But what did they tell you?"

"They told me nothing."

"Well, what then?"

"Then, after you left me I went on bargaining for oats."

"Yes. What next?"

"Next, the peasant who spoke to me asked for earnest-money; that was fair. I asked him for a receipt; that was fair, too. He wanted to go to a shop and write it. 'No,' I said. 'Here's a pencil; haven't you a scrap of paper about you? My hat will do for a table.' He tore off the back of a letter and gave me a receipt. There it is. Read it."

The sub-prefect took the paper, and read;--

"Received, of M. Jean-Louis Robier, the sum of fifty francs, on account, for thirty sacks of flour, which I engage to deliver to him May 28.

F. Terrien.

May 14, 1832."

"Well," said the sub-prefect, "I don't see any information there."

"Turn over the paper."

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed the functionary.

The paper which he held was one half of a page of letter paper torn through the middle. On the other side from that on which the receipt was written were these words:--

arquis ceived this instant the news her whom we are expecting. Beaufays, evening of 26th send officers of your division presented to Madame. your people in hand. respectfully, oux.

"The devil!" cried the sub-prefect; "that is nothing more nor less than a call to arms. It is easy enough to make out the rest."

"Nothing easier," said the general. Then he added, in a low voice, "Too easy, perhaps."

"Ah, ça! didn't you tell me these people were sly and cautious? I call this, on the contrary, a bit of innocent carelessness which is amazing."

"Wait," said Dermoncourt; "that's not all."

"Ah, ha!"

"After parting with my seller of oats I met a beggar, half an idiot. I talked to him about the good God and the saints and the Virgin, about the buckwheat and the apple year (you observe that the apple-trees are in bloom), and I ended by asking him if he could not act as guide for us to Loroux, where, as you know, I am to make an inspection. 'I can't,' said my idiot, with a mischievous look. 'Why not?' I asked in the stupidest way I could. 'Because I am ordered to guide a lady and two gentlemen from Puy-Laurens to La Flocelière.'"

"The devil! here's a complication."

"On the contrary, enlightenment."

"Explain."

"Confidences which are given when not extorted, in a region where it is so difficult to get them, seem to me such clumsy traps that an old fox like myself ought to be ashamed to be caught by them. The Duchesse de Berry, if she is really in La Vendée, cannot be at Souday and Beaufays and Puy-Laurens at the same time. What do you think, my dear sub-prefect?"

"Confound it all!" replied the public functionary, scratching his head, "I think she may have been, or still may be, in all those places, one after another; but if I were you, instead of chasing her round from place to place, where she may or may not have been, I should go straight to La Flocelière, where your idiot is to take her to-day."

"Then you would make a very poor bloodhound, my dear fellow. The only reliable information we have so far received is that given by the scamp who had the biscuit, and whom you examined here--"

"But the others?"

"I'll bet my general's epaulets against those of a sub-lieutenant that the others were put in my way by some shrewd fellows who saw and suspected our talk with the man about his biscuit. Let us begin the hunt, my dear sub-prefect, and confine our attention to Souday, if we don't want to make an utter failure of it."

"Bravo!" cried the sub-prefect. "I feared I had committed a blunder; but what you say reassures me."

"What have you done?"

"Well, I have got the name of this mayor. He is called Courtin, and is mayor of the village of la Logerie."

"I know that. It is close by the spot where we came near capturing Charette thirty-seven years ago."

"Well, this man has pointed out to me an individual who could serve us as guide, and whom it would be well to arrest so that he may not go back to the château and give the alarm."

"Who is the man?"

"The marquis's steward. Here is a description of him."

The general took the paper and read:--

"Short gray hair, low forehead, keen black eyes, bushy eyebrows, wart on his nose, hair in the nostrils, whiskers round the face, round hat, velveteen jacket, waistcoat and breeches the same, leathern belt and gaiters. Special points: a brown, retriever, and the second incisor on the left side broken."

"Good!" said the general; "that's my oat-seller to a tee. Terrien! His name is no more Terrien than mine's Barabbas."

"Well, general, you can soon make sure of that."

"How so?"

"He'll be here in a minute."

"Here?"

"Yes."

"Is he coming here?"

"He is coming here."

"Of his own will?"

"His own will, or by force."

"Force?"

"Yes; I have just given the order to arrest him. It is done by this time."

"Ten thousand thunders!" cried the general, letting his fist fall upon the table with such a thud that the public functionary bounded in his chair. "Ten thousand thunders!" he cried again; "what have you done?"

"He seems to me, general, a dangerous man from all I hear of him, and there was but one thing to do,--namely, arrest him."

"Dangerous! dangerous! He is much more dangerous now than he was ten minutes ago."

"But if he is in custody he can't do harm."

"No matter how quick your men are they won't prevent his giving warning. The princess will be warned before we have gone a couple of miles. It will be lucky for us if you haven't roused the whole population so that I cannot take a single man from the garrison."

"Perhaps there's yet time," said the sub-prefect, rushing to the door.

"Yes, make haste. Ah! thunder! it's too late!"

A dull roar was heard without, deepening every second until it reached the volume of that dreadful concert of sounds made by a multitude as the prelude to a battle.

The general opened the window. He saw, at a short distance from the inn, Jean Oullier, bound and in the grasp of gendarmes who were bringing him along. The crowd surrounded them, howling and threatening. The gendarmes came on slowly and with difficulty. They had not as yet made use of their arms. There was not a moment to lose.

"Well, the wine is drawn; we have got to drink it," said the general, pulling off his civilian clothes, and hastily getting into his regimentals. Then he called to his secretary.

"Rusconi, my horse! my horse!" he shouted. "As for you, Monsieur le sous-préfet, call out your militia, if you have any; but not a gun is to be fired without my orders."

A captain, sent by the secretary, entered the room.

"Captain," said the general, "bring your men into the courtyard. Order my chasseurs to mount; two days' rations, and twenty-five cartridges to each man; and hold yourself ready to follow me at the first signal I give you."

The old general, recovering all the fire of his youth, went down into the courtyard, where, sending the civilians to the right-about, he ordered the gates into the street to be opened.

"What!" cried the sub-prefect, "you are surely not going to present yourself to that

furious crowd all alone?"

"That's precisely what I am going to do. Damn it! your men must be supported. This is no time for sentiment. Open that gate."

The two sides of the gate were no sooner opened than the general, setting spurs to his horse, was instantly in the middle of the street and the thick of the mêlée. This sudden apparition of an old soldier, with a determined face and martial bearing, in full uniform, and glittering with decorations, together with the bold promptitude of his action, produced an electric effect upon the crowd. The clamoring ceased as if by magic. Cudgels were lowered; the peasants who were nearest to the general actually touched their hats; the crowd made way, and the soldier of Rivoli and the Pyramids rode on some twenty paces in the direction of the gendarmes.

"Why, what's the matter with you, my gars?" he cried, in so stentorian a voice that he was heard even to the neighboring streets.

"They've arrested Jean Oullier; that's what's the matter with us," replied a voice.

"And Jean Oullier is a good man," shouted another.

"They ought to arrest bad men, and not good ones," said a third.

"And that's why we are not going to let them take Jean Oullier," cried a fourth.

"Silence!" said the general, in so imperious a tone that every voice was hushed. "If Jean Oullier is a good man, a worthy man,--which I do not doubt,--Jean Oullier will be released. If he is one who is trying to deceive you and take advantage of your good and loyal feelings, Jean Oullier will be punished. Do you think it unjust to punish those who try to plunge the country back into those horrors of civil war of which the old now tell the young with tears?"

"Jean Oullier is a peaceable man, and doesn't do harm to any one," said a voice.

"What are you wanting now?" continued the general, without noticing the interruption. "Your priests are respected; your religion is ours. Have we killed the

king, as in 1793? Have we abolished God, as in 1794? Is your property in danger? No; you and your property are safe under the common law. Never were your trades and your commerce so flourishing."

"That is true," said a young peasant.

"Don't listen to bad Frenchmen who, to satisfy their selfish passions, do not shrink from calling down upon their country all the horrors of civil war. Can't you remember what those horrors were? Must I remind you of them? Must I bring to mind your old men, your mothers, your wives, your children massacred before your eyes, your harvests trampled under foot, your cottages in flames, death and ruin at every hearth!"

"It was the Blues who did it all," cried a voice.

"No, it was not the Blues," continued the general. "It was those who drove you to that senseless struggle, senseless then, but wicked now,--a struggle which had at least a pretext then, but has none whatever in these days."

While speaking the general pushed his horse in the direction of the gendarmes, who, on their side, made every effort to reach the general. This was all the more possible because his address, soldierly as it was, made an evident impression on some of the peasants. Many lowered their heads and were silent; others made remarks to their neighbors, which seemed from their manner to imply approval.

Nevertheless, the farther the general advanced into the crowd, the less favorable grew the expression of the faces. In fact, the nearest to him were altogether menacing; and the owners of these faces were evidently the promoters and the leaders of the uproar,--probably the chiefs of the various bands and what were called the captains of parishes.

For such men as these it was useless to be eloquent; their determination was fixed not to listen and not to let others listen. They did not shout nor cry; they roared and howled. The general understood the situation. He resolved to impress the minds of

these men by one of those acts of personal vigor which have such enormous influence on the multitude.

Aubin Courte-Joie was in the front rank of the rioters. This may seem strange in view of his crippled condition. But Aubin Courte-Joie had, for the time being, added to his useless wooden legs two good and powerful legs of flesh and blood. In other words, he was mounted on the shoulders of a colossal tramp; and the said tramp, by means of straps attached to the wooden legs of his rider, was able to hold the cripple as firmly in his seat as the general was in his saddle.

Thus perched, Aubin Courte-Joie's head was on the level of the general's epaulet, where he kept up a series of frantic vociferations and threatening gestures. The general stretched out his hand, took the tavern-keeper by the collar of his jacket, and then, by sheer force of wrist, raised him, held him a moment suspended above the crowd, and then handed him over to a gendarme, saying:--

"Lock up that mountebank; he is enough to give one a headache."

The tramp, relieved of his rider, raised his head, and the general recognized the idiot he had talked with an hour earlier; only, by this time the idiot looked as shrewd and clever as any of them.

The general's action had raised a laugh from the crowd, but this hilarity did not last long. Aubin Courte-Joie happened to be held by the gendarme who was placed to the left of Jean Oullier. He gently drew from his pocket an open knife, and plunged it to the hilt in the breast of the gendarme, crying out:--

"Vive Henri V.! Fly, gars Oullier!"

At the same instant the tramp, inspired perhaps by a legitimate sentiment of emulation, and wishing to make a worthy rejoinder to the athletic action of the general, glided under his horse, caught the general by the boot, and with a sudden and vigorous movement, pitched him over on the other side.

The general and the gendarme fell at the same instant, and they might have been

thought dead; but the general was up immediately and into his saddle with as much strength as adroitness. As he sprang to his seat he gave such a powerful blow with his fist on the bare head of the late idiot that the latter, without uttering a cry, fell to the ground as if his skull were broken. Neither tramp nor gendarme rose again. The tramp had fainted; the gendarme was dead.

Jean Oullier, on his part, though his hands were bound, gave such a vigorous blow with his shoulder to the gendarme on his right that the latter staggered. Jean Oullier jumped over the dead body of the gendarme on the left, and darted into the crowd.

But the general's eye was everywhere, even behind him.

Instantly he turned his horse. The animal bounded into the centre of the living whirlpool, and the old soldier caught Jean Oullier as he had caught Aubin Courte-Joie, and threw him across the pommel of his own saddle. Then the stones began to rain, and the cudgels rose. The gendarmes held firm, presenting their bayonets to the crowd, which dared not attack them at close quarters and was forced to content itself by flinging projectiles.

They advanced in this way to about sixty feet from the inn. Here the position of the general and his men became critical. The peasants, who seemed determined that Jean Oullier should not be left in the enemy's power, grew more and more aggressive. Already the bayonets were stained with blood, and the fury of the rioters was evidently increasing. Fortunately the general was now near enough to the courtyard of the inn for his voice to reach it.

"Here! grenadiers of the 32d!" he shouted.

At the same instant the gates opened, and the soldiers poured forth with fixed bayonets and drove back the crowd. The general and the gendarmes entered the yard. Here the general encountered the sub-prefect, who was awaiting him.

"There's your man," he said, flinging Jean Oullier to him, as if the Chouan were a bale of goods; "and trouble enough he has cost us! God grant he is worth his price."

Just then a brisk firing was heard from the farther end of the market-place.

"What's that?" cried the general, listening with all his ears, and his nostrils open.

"The National Guard, no doubt," replied the sub-prefect. "I ordered them out, and they must have met the rioters."

"Who ordered them to fire?"

"I did, general. I was bound to go to your rescue."

"Ten thousand thunders! Can't you see that I rescued myself?" said the old soldier. Then, shaking his head, he added, "Monsieur, remember this: to shed blood in civil war is worse than a crime; it is a blunder."

An officer galloped into the courtyard.

"General," he said, "the rioters are flying in all directions. The chasseurs are here. Shall we pursue them?"

"Not a man is to stir," said the general. "Leave the National Guard to manage the affair. They are friends; they'll settle it."

A second discharge of musketry proved that the militia and the peasantry were indeed settling it. This was the firing heard at La Logerie by Baron Michel.

"Ah!" said the general, "now we must see what profit we can get out of this melancholy business." Pointing to Jean Oullier, he added, "We have but one chance, and that is that no one but this man is in the secret. Did he have any communication with any one after you arrested him, gendarmes?"

"No, general, not even by signs, for his hands were bound."

"Didn't he make any gestures with his head, or say a word to anybody? You know very well that a nod or a single word is enough with these fellows."

"No, general, not one."

"Well then, we may as well run the chance. Let your men eat their rations, captain; in half an hour we start. The gendarmes and the National Guard are enough to guard

the town. I shall take my escort of chasseurs to clear the way."

So saying, the general retired into the inn. The soldiers made their preparations for departure.

During this time Jean Oullier sat stolidly on a stone in the middle of the courtyard, kept in sight by the two gendarmes who were guarding him. His face retained its habitual impassibility. With his two bound hands he stroked his dog, which had followed him, and was now resting its head on his knees and licking his hand, as if to remind the prisoner in his misfortune that a friend was near him.

Jean Oullier was gently stroking the faithful creature's head with the feather of a wild duck he might have picked up in the courtyard. Suddenly, profiting by a moment when his two guards were speaking to each other and not observing him, he slipped the feather between the teeth of the animal, made it a sign of intelligence, and rose, saying, in a low voice:--

"Go, Pataud!"

The dog gently moved away, looking back at his master from time to time. Then, when he reached the gate, he bounded out, unobserved by any one, and disappeared.

"Good!" said Jean Oullier to himself. "He'll get there before we do."

Unfortunately, the gendarmes were not the only ones who were watching the prisoner.

XXI.

JEAN OULLIER'S RESOURCES.

Even in these days there are few good roads in La Vendée, and those few have been made since 1832, that is, since the period of which we are now writing. This lack of roads was the principal strength of the insurgents in the great war. Let us say a word on those that then existed, concerning ourselves only with those on the left bank of the Loire.

They were two in number. The first went from Nantes to Rochelle, through Montaigu; the second from Nantes to Paimb[oe]uf by the Pélerin, following almost continuously the banks of the river.

Besides these two main highways, there were other secondary or cross roads; these went from Nantes to Beaupréau through Vallet, from Nantes to Mortagne, Chollet, and Bressuire by Clisson, from Nantes to Sables-d'Olonne by Légé, and from Nantes to Challans by Machecoul. To reach Machecoul by either of these roads it was necessary to make a long detour, in fact, as far round as Légé; thence along the road from Nantes to Sables-d'Olonne, following that until it was crossed by the road to Challans, by which the traveller retraced his way to Machecoul.

The general knew too well that the whole success of his expedition depended on the rapidity with which it was conducted to be willing to resign himself to so long a march. Besides, none of these roads were favorable for military operations. They were bordered by deep ditches, gorse, bushes of all kinds, and trees; in many places they were sunken between high banks with hedges at the top. Such roads, under any of these conditions, were favorable for ambuscades; the little advantage they offered in no way counterbalanced their risks. The general therefore determined to follow a cross-country road which led to Machecoul by Vieille-Vigne and shortened the way by over four miles.

The system of encampments the general had adopted since coming to La Vendée had familiarized his soldiers with the nature of the land and given them a good eye for dangerous places. The captain in command of the infantry knew the way as far as the Boulogne river; but from that point it was necessary to have a guide. It was plain that Jean Oullier would not be willing to show the way, and another man was therefore obtained on whose fidelity they could rely.

The general in deciding on the cross-road took every precaution against a surprise. Two chasseurs, pistol in hand, went first to reconnoitre the way for the column;

while a dozen men on each side of the road examined the gorse and the bushes which lined it everywhere and sometimes overtopped it. The general marched at the head of his little troop, in the midst of which he had placed Jean Oullier.

The old Vendéan, with his wrists bound, was mounted behind a chasseur; for greater security a girth had been passed around his body and buckled across the breast of the soldier before him; so that Jean Oullier if he could even have freed his hands could not escape his bonds to the rider before him. Two other chasseurs rode to the left and right with special orders to watch him carefully.

It was about six in the evening when the detachment left Montaigu; they had fifteen miles to do, and, supposing that those fifteen miles took five hours, they ought to be at the château de Souday by eleven. The hour seemed favorable to the general for his plans. If Courtin's report was correct, if he had not been misled in his conclusions, the leaders of the last Vendéan movement were now assembled at Souday to confer with the princess, and it was likely that they would not have left the château before his arrival. If this were so, nothing could prevent him from capturing them all by one throw of the net.

After marching for half an hour, that is, to a distance of about a mile and a half from Montaigu, just as the little column was passing the crossway of Saint-Corentin they came upon an old woman in rags, who was praying on her knees before a wayside crucifix. At the noise the column made she turned her head, and then, as if impelled by curiosity, she rose and stood beside the road to see it pass. The gold-laced coat of the general seemed to give her the idea of begging, and she muttered the sort of prayer with which beggars ask for alms.

Officers and soldiers, preoccupied with other matters, and growing surly as the twilight deepened, passed on without attending to her.

"Your general took no notice of that poor woman who asked for bread," said Jean Oullier to the chasseur who was on his right.

"Why do you think so?" said the soldier.

"Because he did not give her anything. Let him beware. Whoso repulses the open palm must fear the closed fist, says the proverb. Harm will happen to us."

"If you take that prediction to yourself, my good man, you are not mistaken, inasmuch as you are already in peril."

"Yes, and that is why I would like to conjure it away."

"How can you?"

"Feel in my pocket for me and take out a piece of money."

"What for?"

"To give to that old woman, and then she'll share her prayers between me who give the alms and you who enable her to get them."

The chasseur shrugged his shoulders; but superstitions are singularly contagious, and those attached to ideas of charity are more so than others. The soldier, while pretending to be above such nonsense, thought he ought not to refuse to do the kindness Jean Oullier asked of him, which might, moreover, bring down the blessing of Heaven on both of them.

The troop was at this moment wheeling to the right into the sunken road which leads to Vieille-Vigne. The general stopped his horse to watch the men file past him, and see with his own eyes that all the arrangements he had ordered were carried out; it thus happened that he saw Jean Oullier speaking to the chasseur, and he also saw the soldier's action.

"What do you mean by letting the prisoner speak to strangers on the road?" he said sharply.

The chasseur related what had happened.

"Halt!" cried the general; "arrest that woman, and search her."

The order was instantly obeyed, but nothing was found on the old beggar-woman

but a few pieces of copper money, which the general examined with the utmost care. In vain did he turn and re-turn the coins; nothing could he find in the least suspicious about them. He put the coins in his pocket, however, giving to the old woman a five-franc piece in exchange. Jean Oullier watched the general's actions with a sarcastic smile.

"Well, you see," he said in a low voice but loud enough for the beggar-woman to hear him without losing a single word, "you see the poor alms of a prisoner" (he emphasized the word) "have brought you luck, old mother; and that's another reason still why you should remember me in your prayers. A dozen Ave Marias said for him will greatly help the salvation of a poor devil."

Jean Oullier raised his voice as he said the last words.

"My good man," said the general to Jean Oullier when the column had resumed its march, "in future you must address yourself to me when you have any charity to do; I'll recommend you to the prayers of those you want to succor; my mediation won't do you any harm up above, and it may spare you many an annoyance here below. As for you, men," continued the general, speaking gruffly to his cavalry, "don't forget my orders in future; for the harm will fall upon yourselves, and I tell you so!"

At Vieille-Vigne they halted fifteen minutes to rest the infantry. The Chouan was placed in the centre of the square, so as to isolate him completely from the population which flocked inquisitively about the troop. The horse on which Jean Oullier was mounted had cast a shoe, and was, moreover, tired with its double burden. The general picked out the strongest animal in the squadron to take its place. This horse belonged to one of the troopers in the front rank, who, in spite of the greater exposure to danger where he was, seemed very reluctant to change places with his comrade.

The man was short, stocky, vigorous, with a gentle but intelligent face; and was quite devoid of the cavalier manner which characterized his comrades. During the

preparations for this change, which was made by the light of a lantern (by that time the night was very dark) Jean Oullier caught sight of the face of the man behind whom he was to continue his way; his eyes met those of the soldier, and he noticed that the latter lowered his.

Again the column started, taking every precaution; for the farther they advanced, the thicker grew the bushes and the coverts beside the road; consequently the easier it became to attack them. The prospect of danger to be met and weariness to be endured, on roads which were little better in many places than beds of water-courses strewn with rocks and stones, did not lessen the gayety of the soldiers, who now began, after recovering from their first surliness at nightfall, to find amusement in the idea of danger, and to talk among themselves with that liveliness which seldom deserts a French soldier for any length of time. The chasseur behind whom Jean Oullier was mounted alone took no part in the talk, but was thoughtful and gloomy.

"Confound you, Thomas," said the trooper on the right, addressing him, "you never have much to say for yourself, but to-day, I will declare, one would think you were burying the devil."

"At any rate," said the one to the left, "he has got him on his back. You ought to like that, Thomas, for you are half a Chouan yourself."

"He's a whole Chouan, I'm thinking; doesn't he go to mass every Sunday?"

The chasseur named Thomas had no time to answer these twittings, for the general's voice now ordered the men to break ranks and advance single file, the way having become so narrow and the bank on each side so steep that it was impossible for two horsemen to ride abreast.

During the momentary confusion caused by this man[oe]uvre Jean Oullier began to whistle in a low key the Breton air "The Chouans are men of heart."

At the first note the rider quivered. Then, as the other troopers were now before and behind them, Jean Oullier, safe from observation, put his mouth close to the ear of

the one behind whom he was mounted.

"Ha! you may be as silent as you like, Thomas Tinguy," he whispered; "I knew you at once, and you knew me."

The soldier sighed and made a motion with his shoulders which seem to mean that he was acting against his will. But he made no answer.

"Thomas Tinguy," said Jean Oullier, "do you know where you are going? Do you know where you are taking your father's old friend? To the pillage and destruction of the château de Souday, whose masters have been for years and years the benefactors of your family."

Thomas Tinguy sighed again.

"Your father is dead," continued Jean Oullier.

Thomas made no reply, but he shuddered in his saddle; a single word escaped his lips and reached the ears of Jean Oullier:--

"Dead!"

"Yes, dead," replied the Chouan; "and who watched beside his dying bed with your sister Rosine and received his last sigh? The two young ladies from Souday whom you know well, Mademoiselle Bertha and Mademoiselle Mary; and that at the risk of their lives, for your father died of a malignant fever. Not being able to save his life, angels that they are they stayed beside him to ease his death. Where is your sister now, having no home? At the château de Souday. Ah! Thomas Tinguy, I'd rather be poor Jean Oullier, whom they'll shoot against a wall, than he who takes him bound to execution."

"Hush! Jean, hush!" said Thomas Tinguy, with a sob in his voice; "we are not there yet--wait and see."

While this little colloquy was passing between Jean Oullier and the son of the older Tinguy, the ravine through which the little column was moving began to slope

downward rapidly. They were nearing one of the fords of the Boulogne river.

It was a dark night without a star in the sky; and such a night, while it might favor the ultimate success of the expedition, might also, on the other hand, hinder its march and even imperil it in this wild and unknown country.

When they reached the ford they found the two chasseurs who had been sent in advance, awaiting them, pistol in hand. They were evidently uneasy. The ford, instead of being a clear, shallow stream rippling over pebbles, was a dark and stagnant body of water, washing softly against a rocky bank.

They looked on all sides for the guide whom Courtin had agreed should meet them at this point. The general gave a loud call. A voice answered on the opposite shore,--

"Qui vive?"

"Souday!" replied the general.

"Then you are the ones I am waiting for," said the guide.

"Is this the ford of the Boulogne?" asked the general.

"Yes."

"Why is the water so high?"

"There's a flood since the last rains."

"Is the crossing possible in spite of it?"

"Damn it! I don't know. I have never seen the river as high as this. I think it would be more prudent--"

The guide's voice suddenly stopped, or rather seemed to turn into a moan. Then the sound of a struggle was plainly heard, as if the feet of several men were tussling on the pebbles.

"A thousand thunders!" cried the general, "our guide is being murdered!"

A cry of agony replied to the general's exclamation and confirmed it.

"A grenadier up behind every trooper!" cried the general. "The captain behind me! The two lieutenants stay here with the rest of the troop, the prisoner, and his three guards. Come on, and quickly too!"

In a moment the seventeen chasseurs had each a grenadier behind him. Eighty grenadiers, the two lieutenants, the prisoner and his three guards, including Tinguy, remained on the right bank of the river. The order was executed with the rapidity of thought, and the general, followed by his chasseurs and the seventeen grenadiers behind them, plunged into the bed of the river.

Twenty feet from the shore the horses lost foothold, but they swam for a few moments and reached, without accident, the opposite bank. They had hardly landed when the grenadiers dismounted.

"Can you see anything?" said the general, trying himself to pierce the darkness that surrounded the little troop.

"No, general," said the men with one voice.

"Yet it was certainly from here," said the general, as if speaking to himself, "that the man answered me. Look behind the bushes, but without scattering; you may find his body."

The soldiers obeyed, searching round a radius of some hundred and fifty feet. But they returned in about fifteen minutes and reported that they could see nothing, and had found no traces of the body.

"You saw absolutely nothing?" asked the general.

One grenadier alone came forward, holding in his hand a cotton cap.

"I found this," he said.

"Where?"

"Hooked to a bush."

"That's our guide's cap," said the general.

"How do you know?" asked the captain.

"Because the men who attacked him would have worn hats," replied the general, without the slightest hesitation.

The captain was silent, not daring to ask further; but it was evident that the general's explanation had explained nothing to his mind.

Dermoncourt understood the captain's silence.

"It is very simple," he said; "the men who have just murdered our guide have followed us ever since we left Montaigu for the purpose of rescuing the prisoner. The arrest must be a more important matter than I thought it was. These men who have followed us were at the fair, and wore hats, as they always do when they go to the towns; whereas our guide was called from his bed suddenly by the man who sent him to us, and he would of course put on the cap he was in the habit of wearing; it may even have been on his head as he slept."

"Do you really think, general," said the captain, "that those Chouans would dare to come so near our line of march?"

"They have come step by step with us from Montaigu; they have not let us out of their sight one single instant. Heavens and earth! people complain of our inhumanity in this war, and yet at every step we are made to feel, to our cost, that we have not been inhuman enough. Fool and simpleton that I have been!"

"I understand you less and less, general," said the captain, laughing.

"Do you remember that beggar-woman who spoke to us just after we left Montaigu?"

"Yes, general."

"Well, it was that old hag who put up this attack. I wanted to send her back into the town; I did wrong not to follow my own instinct; I should have saved the life of this poor devil. Ah! I see now how it was done. The Ave Marias for which the prisoner

asked have been answered here."

"Do you think they will dare to attack us?"

"If they were in force it would have been done before now. But there are only six or eight of them at the most."

"Shall I bring over the men on the other bank, general?"

"No, wait; the horses lost foothold and the infantry would drown. There must be some better ford near by."

"You think so, general?"

"Damn it! I'm sure."

"Then you know the river?"

"Never saw it before."

"Then why--?"

"Ah! captain, it is easy to see that you didn't go through the great war, as I did,--that war of savages, in which we had to go by induction. These Vendéan fellows were not posted here on this side of the river in ambuscade at the moment when we came up on the other: that is clear."

"For you, general."

"Hey! bless my soul,--clear to anybody! If they had been posted there, they would have heard the guide and killed him or captured him before we came; consequently the band were on our flank as we came along."

"That is probably so, general."

"And they must have reached the bank of the river just before us. Now the interval between the time we arrived and halted and the moment our guide was attacked was too short to allow of their making a long detour to another ford--no, they must have forded close by."

"Why couldn't they have crossed here?"

"Because a peasant, especially in these interior regions, hardly ever knows how to swim. The ford is close at hand, that is certain. Send four men up the river and four men down. Quick! We don't want to die here, especially in wet clothes."

At the end of ten minutes the officer returned.

"You are right, general," he said; "three hundred yards from here there's a small island; the trunk of a tree joins it with the other bank, and another trunk with this side."

"Good!" said the general; "then they can get across without wetting a cartridge."

Calling to the officer on the opposite bank,--

"Ohé! lieutenant," he said, "go up the river till you come to a tree, cross there, and be sure you watch the prisoner."

XXII.

FETCH! PATAUD, FETCH!

For the next five minutes the two troops advanced slowly up the river, one on each bank. When they reached the place discovered by the captain the general called a halt.

"One lieutenant and forty men across!" he cried.

Forty men and one lieutenant came over with the water up to their shoulders, though they were able to lift their guns and their cartridge-boxes above the surface. On landing, they ranged in line of battle.

"Now," said the general, "bring over the prisoner."

Thomas Tinguy entered the water with a chasseur on each side of him.

"Thomas," said Jean Oullier, in a low but penetrating voice, "If I were in your place I should be afraid of one thing; I should expect to see the ghost of my father rising

before me and asking why I shed the blood of his best friend rather than just unbuckle a miserable girth."

The chasseur passed his hand over his forehead, which was bathed in sweat, and made the sign of the cross. At this moment the three riders were in the middle of the river, but the current had slightly separated them.

Suddenly, a loud sound accompanied by the splashing of water proved that Jean Oullier had not in vain evoked before the poor superstitious Breton soldier the revered image of his father.

The general knew at once what the sound meant.

"The prisoner is escaping!" he cried in a voice of thunder. "Light torches, spread yourselves along the bank, fire upon him if he shows himself. As for you," he added addressing Thomas Tinguy, who came ashore close to him without attempting to escape,--"as for you, you go no farther."

Taking a pistol from his belt he fired.

"Thus die all traitors!" he cried.

And Thomas Tinguy, shot through the breast, fell dead.

The soldiers, obeying orders with a rapidity which showed they felt the gravity of their situation, rushed along the river in the direction of the current. A dozen torches lighted on each bank threw their ruddy glare upon the water.

Jean Oullier, released from his chief bond when Thomas Tinguy unbuckled the girth, slid from the horse and plunged into the river, passing between the legs of the horse on the right. We may now inquire how it is possible for a man to swim with his hands bound in front of him.

Jean Oullier had relied so confidently on his appeal to the son of his old friend that as soon as the darkness fell he began to gnaw the rope that bound his wrists with his teeth. He had good teeth, so that by the time they reached the river the rope held

only by a single strand; once in the water a vigorous jerk parted it altogether.

At the end of a few seconds the Chouan was forced to come to the surface and breathe; instantly a dozen shots were fired at him, and as many balls set the water foaming about him. By a miracle none touched him; but he felt the wind of their passage across his face.

It was not prudent to tempt such luck a second time, for then it would be tempting God, not luck. He plunged again, and finding foothold turned to go up the river instead of keeping down with the current; in short, he made what is called in the hunting-field a double; it often succeeds with a hare, why not with a man? thought he.

Jean Oullier therefore doubled, went up the river under water, holding his breath till his chest came near to bursting, and not reappearing on the surface till he was beyond the line of light thrown by the torches on the river.

This man[oe]uvre deceived his enemies. Little supposing that he would voluntarily add another danger to his flight, the soldiers continued to look for him down instead of up the river, holding their guns like hunters watching for game, and ready to fire the instant that he showed himself. Their interest in the sport was all the greater because the game was a man.

Half a dozen grenadiers alone beat up the river, and they carried but one torch among them.

Stifling as best he could the heavy sound of his breathing, Jean Oullier managed to reach a willow the branches of which stretched over the river, their tips even touching the water. The swimmer seized a branch, put it between his teeth, and held himself thus with his head thrown back so that his mouth and nostrils were out of water and able to breathe the air.

He had hardly recovered his breath before he heard a plaintive howl from the spot where the column had halted and where he himself had dropped into the river. He

knew the sound.

"Pataud!" he murmured; "Pataud here, when I sent him to Souday! Something has happened to him! Oh, my God! my God!" he cried with inexpressible fervor and deep faith, "now, now it is all-important to save me from being recaptured."

The soldiers had seen Jean Oullier's dog in the courtyard and they recognized him.

"There's his dog! there's his dog!" they cried.

"Bravo!" cried a sergeant; "he'll help us to catch his master."

And he tried to lay a hand on him. But although the poor animal seemed stiff and tired, he eluded the man's grasp, and sniffing the air in the direction of the current he jumped into the river.

"This way, comrades, this way!" cried the sergeant, stretching his arm in the direction taken by the dog "He's after his master."

The moment Jean Oullier heard Pataud's cry he put his head out of water, regardless of the consequences to himself. He saw the dog cutting diagonally across the river, swimming directly for him; he knew he was lost if he did not make some mighty effort. To sacrifice his dog was to Jean Oullier a supreme effort. If his own life alone had been in the balance Jean Oullier would have taken his risks and been lost or saved with Pataud; at any rate he would have hesitated before he saved himself at the cost of the dog's life.

He quickly took off the goatskin cape he wore over his jacket and let it float on the surface of the water, giving it a strong push into the middle of the current. Pataud was then not twenty feet from him.

"Seek! fetch!" he said in a low voice showing the direction to the dog, Then, as the poor animal, feeling no doubt that his strength was leaving him, hesitated to obey.

"Fetch, Pataud, fetch!" cried Jean Oullier, imperatively.

Pataud turned and swam in the direction of the goatskin, which was now about fifty

feet away from him. Jean Oullier, seeing that his trick had succeeded, dived again at the moment when the soldiers on the bank were alongside the willow. One of them carrying the torch scrambled quickly up the tree and lit the whole bed of the river. The goatskin was plainly seen floating rapidly down the current, and Pataud was swimming after it, moaning and whining as if distressed that his failing strength prevented him from accomplishing his master's order.

The soldiers, following the dog's lead, redescended the river, going farther and farther away from Jean Oullier. As soon as one of them caught sight of the goatskin he shouted to his comrades:--

"Here, friends! here he is! here he is, the brigand!" and he fired at the goatskin.

Grenadiers and chasseurs ran pell-mell along both banks, getting farther and farther from Jean Oullier, and riddling the goatskin, after which Pataud was still swimming, with their balls. For some minutes the firing was so continuous that there was no need of torches; the flashes of burning sulphur from the muskets lit up the wild ravine through which the Boulogne flows, while the rocks, echoing back the volleys, redoubled the noise.

The general was the first to discover the blunder of his men.

"Stop the firing!" he said to the captain who was still beside him; "those fools have dropped the prey for the shadow."

Just then a brilliant light shone from the crest of the rocky ridge overhanging the river; a sharp hiss sounded above the heads of the two officers, and a ball buried itself in the trunk of a tree beyond them.

"Ah ha!" exclaimed the general, coolly; "that rascal only asked for a dozen Ave Marias, but his friends are inclined to be liberal!"

Three or four more shots were now fired, and the balls ricochetted along the shore. One man cried out. Then, in a voice that overpowered the tumult, the general shouted:

"Bugles, sound the recall! and you, there, put out the torches!"

Then in a low voice to the captain,--

"Bring the other forty over at once; we shall need every man here in a minute."

The soldiers, startled by this night attack, clustered round their general. Five or six flashes, at rather long distances apart, shone from the crest of the ravine, and lit up momentarily the dark dome of the sky. A grenadier fell dead; the horse of a chasseur reared and fell over on his rider with a ball through his chest.

"Forward! a thousand thunders! forward!" cried the general, "and let's see if those night-hawks will dare to wait for us."

Putting himself at the head of his men he began to climb the slope of the ravine with such vigor that, in spite of the darkness which made the ascension difficult, and in spite of the balls which met them and brought down two more of his men, the little troop soon scaled the height. The enemy's fire stopped instantly, and though a few shaking furze-bushes still showed the recent presence of Chouans, it might be thought that the earth had opened and swallowed them up.

"Sad war! sad war!" muttered the general. "And now, of course, our whole expedition is a failure. No matter! better attempt it. Besides, Souday is on the road to Machecoul, and we can't rest our men short of Machecoul."

"But we want a guide, general," said the captain.

"Guide! Don't you see that light, a thousand feet off, over there?"

"A light?"

"Damn it, yes!--a light."

"No, I don't, general."

"Well, I see it. That light means a hut; a hut means a peasant; and whether that peasant be man, woman, or child, he or she shall be made to guide us through the forest."

Then, in a tone which augured ill for the inhabitant of the hut, the general gave orders to resume the march, after carefully extending his line of scouts and guards as far as he dared expose the individual safety of his men.

The general, followed by his little column, had hardly passed out of sight beyond the ridge before a man came out of the water, stopped an instant behind a willow to listen attentively, and then glided from bush to bush along the shore, with the evident intention of following the path the troop had taken.

As he grasped a tuft of heather to begin the ascent he heard a feeble moan at a little distance. Jean Oullier--for of course it was he--turned instantly in the direction of the moans. The nearer he approached them, the more distressing they became. The man stooped down with his hands stretched out and felt them licked with a warm, soft tongue.

"Pataud! my poor Pataud!" murmured the Vendéan.

It was, indeed, poor Pataud, who had spent the last of his strength in dragging ashore the goatskin his master had sent him for, on which he had now lain down to die.

Jean Oullier took the garment from under him, and called him by name. Pataud gave one long moan, but did not move. Jean Oullier lifted him in his arms to carry him; but the dog no longer stirred. The Vendéan felt the hand with which he held him wet with a warm and viscous fluid. He raised it to his face and smelt the fetid odor of blood. He tried to open the jaws of the poor creature, but they were clenched. Pataud had died in saving his master, whom chance had brought back to him for a last caress.

Had the dog been wounded by a ball aimed by the soldiers at the goatskin, or was he already wounded when he jumped into the water to follow Jean Oullier?

The Vendéan leaned to the last opinion. Pataud's halt beside the river, the feebleness with which he swam,--all induced Jean Oullier to think that the poor animal had been previously wounded.

"Well," he said sadly, "to-morrow I'll clear it up, and sorrow to him who killed you, my poor dog!"

So saying, he laid Pataud's body beneath a shrubby bush, and springing up the hillside was lost to sight among the gorse.

XXIII.

TO WHOM THE COTTAGE BELONGED.

The cottage, where the general had seen the light his captain could not see, was occupied by two families. The heads of these families were brothers. The elder was named Joseph, the younger Pascal Picaut. The father of these Picauts had taken part, in 1792, in the first uprising of the Retz district, and followed the fortunes of the sanguinary Souchu, as the pilot-fish follows the shark, as the jackal follows the lion; and he had taken part in the horrible massacres which signalized the outbreak of the insurrection on the left bank of the Loire.

When Charette did justice on that Carrier of the white cockade Souchu, Picaut, whose sanguinary appetites were developed, sulked at the new leader, who, to his mind, made the serious mistake of not desiring blood except upon the battlefield. He therefore left the division under Charette, and joined that commanded by the terrible Jolly, an old surgeon of Machecoul. He, at least, was on a level with Picaut's enthusiasm. But Jolly, recognizing the need of unity, and instinctively foreseeing the military genius of the leader of the Lower Vendée, placed himself under Charette's banner; and Picaut, who had not been consulted, dispensed with consulting his commander, and once more abandoned his comrades. Tired out with these perpetual changes, profoundly convinced that time would never lessen the savage hatred he felt for the murderers of Souchu, he sought a general who was not likely to be seduced by the splendor of Charette's exploits, and found him in Stofflet, whose antagonism against the hero of the Retz region was already revealed in numberless instances.

On the 25th of February, 1796, Stofflet was made prisoner at the farm of Poitevinière, with two aides-de-camp and two chasseurs who accompanied him. The Vendéan leader and his aides were shot, and the peasants were sent back to their cottages. Picaut was one of them. It was then two years since he had seen his home.

Arriving there, he found two fine young men, vigorous and well-grown, who threw themselves upon his neck and embraced him. They were his sons. The eldest was seventeen years old, the youngest sixteen. Picaut accepted their caresses with a good grace and looked them well over. He examined their structure, their athletic frames, and felt their muscles with evident satisfaction. He had left two children behind him; he found two soldiers. Only, like himself, these soldiers were unarmed.

The Republic had, in fact, taken from Picaut the carbine and sabre he had obtained through English gold. But Picaut resolved that the Republic should be generous enough to return them and to arm his two sons in compensation for the harm she had done him. It is true that he did not intend to consult the Republic on this point.

The next day he ordered his sons to take their cudgels of wild apple-wood and set out with him for Torfou. At Torfou there was a demi-brigade of infantry. When Picaut, who marched by night and scorned all regular roads, saw, as he crossed the fields, an agglomeration of lights before him, which revealed the town and showed him he had almost reached the end of his journey, he ordered his sons to continue to follow him, but to imitate all his movements and to stop short, motionless, the instant they heard the cry made by a blackbird when suddenly awakened. There is no hunter but knows that the blackbird, suddenly roused, utters three or four rapid notes which are quite peculiar and unmistakable.

Then, instead of walking forward as before, Picaut began to crawl around the outskirts of the town, in the shadow of the hedges, listening every twenty steps or so, with the utmost attention.

At last he heard a step,--the slow, measured, monotonous step of one man. Picaut

went flat on his stomach, and continued to crawl toward the sound on his knees and elbows. His sons imitated him. When he came to the end of the field he was in, Picaut made an opening in the hedge and looked through it. Being satisfied with what he saw he enlarged the hole, and, without much regard to the thorns he encountered, he slipped like an adder through the branches. When he reached the other side he gave the cry of the blackbird. His sons stopped at the given signal; but they stood up, and looking over the top of the hedge they watched their father's proceedings.

The field into which Picaut had now passed was one of tall and very thick grass, which was swaying in the wind. At the farther end of this field, about fifty yards off, was the high-road. On this road a sentry was pacing up and down, about three hundred feet from a building which was used as barracks, before the door of which another sentry was placed. The two young men took all this in with a single glance, and then their eyes returned to their father, who continued to crawl through the grass in the direction of the sentinel.

When Picaut was not more than six feet from the road he stopped behind a bush. The sentinel was pacing up and down, and each time that he turned his back toward the town, as he paced along, his clothes or his musket touched the bush behind which Picaut was crouching. The lads trembled for their father every time that this happened.

Suddenly, and at a moment when the wind seemed to rise, a stifled cry came to them on the breeze. Then, with that acuteness of vision which men accustomed to use their faculties at night soon acquire, they saw on the white line of road a struggling black mass. It was Picaut and the sentinel. After stabbing the sentinel with a knife, Picaut was strangling him.

A moment later the Vendéan was on his way back to his sons; and presently, like the she-wolf after slaughter dividing her booty among her cubs, he bestowed the

musket, sabre, and cartridges on the youths. With this first equipment for service it was very much easier to obtain a second.

But weapons were not all that Picaut wanted; his object was to obtain the occasion to use them. He looked about him. In Messieurs d'Autichamp, de Scepeaux, de Puisaye, and de Bourmont, who still kept the field, he found only what he called rose-water royalists, who did not make war in a way to suit him, none of them resembling Souchu, the type of all that Picaut wanted in a leader.

It resulted that Picaut, rather than be, as he thought, ill-commanded, resolved to make himself an independent leader and command others. He recruited a few malcontents like himself, and became the leader of a band which, though numerically small, never wearied in giving proofs of its hatred to the Republic.

Picaut's tactics were of the simplest. He lived in the forests. During the day he and his men rested. At night he left the sheltering woods, and ambushed his little troop behind the hedges. If a government convoy or a diligence came along, he attacked and robbed it. When convoys were rare and diligences too strongly escorted, Picaut found his compensation with the pickets whom he shot, and the farmhouses and buildings of the patriots, which he burned. After one or two expeditions his followers gave him the name of "Sans-Quartier," and Picaut, who resolved, conscientiously, to deserve that title, never failed, after its bestowal, to hang, shoot, or disembowel all republicans--male and female, citizens or soldiers, old men and children--who fell into his hands.

He continued his operations till 1800. At that period, Europe, leaving the First Consul some respite (or the First Consul leaving Europe a respite), Bonaparte, who had no doubt heard of the fame of Picaut Sans-Quartier's exploits, resolved to consecrate his leisure to that warrior, and sent against him, not a corps d'armée, but two Chouans, recruited in the rue de Jérusalem, and two brigades of gendarmerie.

Picaut, not distrustful, admitted his two false compatriots into his band. A few days

later he fell into a snare. He was caught, together with most of his men, and he paid with his head for the bloody renown he had acquired. It was as a highwayman and a robber of diligences, and not as a soldier, that he was condemned to the guillotine instead of being shot. He went boldly to the scaffold, asking no more quarter for himself than he had given to others.

Joseph, his eldest son, was sent to the galleys with those of the band who were captured. Pascal, the younger, escaped the trap laid for his father, and took to the forests, where he continued to "Chouanize" with the remnants of the band. But this savage life soon became intolerable to him, and one fine day he went to Beaupréau, gave his sabre and musket to the first soldier he met, and asked to be taken to the commandant of the town, to whom he related his history.

This commandant, a major of dragoons, took an interest in the poor devil, and, in consideration of his youth and the singular confidence with which he had come to him, he offered young Picaut to enlist him in his regiment. In case of refusal, he should, he said, be obliged to hand him over to the legal authorities. Before such an alternative Pascal Picaut (who had now heard of the fate of his father and brother, and had no desire to return to his own neighborhood) did not hesitate. He donned the Republican uniform.

Fourteen years later the two sons of Sans-Quartier met again and returned to their former home, to claim possession of their father's little property. The return of the Bourbons had opened the gates of the galleys for Joseph and released Pascal, who, from being a brigand of La Vendée, was then a brigand of the Loire.

Joseph, issuing from the galleys, returned to the family cottage more violent in feeling than ever his father had been. He burned to avenge in the blood of patriots the death of his father, and his own tortures.

Pascal, on the contrary, returned home with ideas quite changed from his earlier ones, changed by the different world he had seen, and changed, above all, by contact

with men to whom hatred of the Bourbons was a duty, the fall of Napoleon a sorrow, the entrance of the Allies a disgrace,--feelings which were kept alive in his heart by the cross that he wore on his breast.

Nevertheless, in spite of these differences of opinion, which led, of course, to frequent discussion, and in spite of the chronic misunderstanding between them, the two brothers did not separate, but continued to live on in the house their father had left them, and to cultivate on shares the fields belonging to it. Both were married,--Joseph, to the daughter of a poor peasant; Pascal, to whom his cross and his little pension gave a certain consideration in the neighborhood, to the daughter of a bourgeois of Saint-Philbert, a patriot like himself.

The presence of two wives in one house, each of whom--one from envy, the other from rancor--exaggerated the sentiments of their husbands, added not a little to the household discord. Nevertheless, the two brothers and their families continued to live together till 1830. The revolution of July, which Pascal approved, roused all the fanatical wrath of Joseph. Pascal's father-in-law became mayor of Saint-Philbert, and then the Chouan and his wife launched forth into such invectives and insults against "those clumsy villains" that Madame Pascal told her husband she would not live any longer with galley-slaves, for she did not feel her life was safe among them.

The old soldier had no children, and he was singularly attached to those of his brother. In particular there was a little fair-haired boy, with cheeks as round and as rosy as a pigeon-apple, whom he felt he could not part with, his chief pleasure in life being to dandle the fellow on his knee for hours together. Pascal felt his heart wrung at the very thought of losing his adopted son. In spite of the wrongs done him by his elder brother, he was strongly attached to him. He knew he was impoverished by the costs of his large family; he feared that the separation might cast him into utter poverty, and he therefore refused his wife's request. But he so far regarded it that the two families ceased to take their meals together. The house had three rooms, and

Pascal retired into one, leaving two for his brother's family and walling up the door of communication.

The evening of the day on which Jean Oullier was made prisoner, the wife of Pascal Picaut was very uneasy. Her husband had left home at four in the afternoon,--about the time when General Dermoncourt and his detachment started from Montaigu. Pascal had to go, he said, and settle some accounts with Courtin at la Logerie; and now, although it was nearly eight o'clock, he had not returned. The poor woman's uneasiness became agony when she heard the shots in the direction of the river. From time to time she left her wheel, on which she was spinning beside the fire, and went to listen at the door. After the firing ceased she heard nothing except the wind in the tree-tops and the plaintive whine of a dog in the distance.

Little Louis, the child whom Pascal loved so much, came to ask if his uncle had returned; but hardly had he put his rosy little face into the room before his mother, calling him harshly back, obliged him to disappear.

For several days Joseph Picaut had shown himself more surly, more threatening than ever; and that very morning, before starting for the fair at Montaigu, he had had a scene with his brother, which if Pascal's patience had not held good, might have ended in a scuffle. The latter's wife dared not say a word to her sister-in-law about her uneasiness.

Suddenly she heard voices muttering in mysterious, low tones in the orchard before the cottage. She rose so hastily that she knocked over her spinning-wheel. At the same instant the door opened, and Joseph Picaut appeared on the threshold.

XXIV.

HOW MARIANNE PICAUT MOURNED HER HUSBAND.

The presence of her brother-in-law, whom Marianne Picaut did not expect at that time, and a vague presentiment of misfortune which came over her at the sight of

him, produced such a painful impression on the poor woman that she fell back into her chair, half dead with terror.

Joseph advanced slowly, without uttering a word to his brother's wife, who stared at him as though she saw a ghost. When he reached the fireplace Joseph Picaut, still silent, took a chair, sat down, and began to stir the embers on the hearth with a stick which he carried in his hand. In the circle of light thrown by the fire Marianne could see that he was very pale.

"In the name of the good God, Joseph," she said, "tell me what is the matter?"

"Who were those villains who came here to-night, Marianne?" asked the Chouan, answering one question by asking another.

"No one came here," she replied, shaking her head to give force to her denial. Then she added, "Joseph, have you seen your brother?"

"Who persuaded him away from home?" continued the Chouan, still questioning, and making no reply.

"No one, I tell you. He left home about four o'clock to go to La Logerie and pay the mayor for that buckwheat he bought for you last week."

"The mayor of La Logerie?" said Joseph Picaut, frowning. "Yes, yes! Maître Courtin. A bold villain, he! Many's the time I've told Pascal,--and this very morning I repeated it,--'Don't tempt the God you deny, or some harm will happen to you.'"

"Joseph! Joseph!" cried Marianne; "how dare you mingle the name of God with words of hatred against your brother who loves you so, you and yours, that he'd take the bread out of his own mouth to give it to your children! If an evil fate brings civil war into the land that's no reason why you should bring it into our home. Good God! Keep your own opinions and let Pascal keep his. His are inoffensive, but yours are not. His gun stays hooked over the fireplace, he meddles with no intrigues, and threatens no party; whereas, for the last six months there has not been a day you haven't gone out armed to the teeth, and sworn evil to the townspeople, of whom my

father is one, and even to my family itself."

"Better go out with a musket and face the villains than betray those among whom you live, like a coward, and guide another army of Blues into the midst of us, that they may pillage the château of those who have kept the faith."

"Who has guided the Blues?"

"Pascal."

"When? where?"

"To-night; at the ford of Pont-Farcy."

"Good God! It was from there the shots came!" cried Marianne.

Suddenly the eyes of the poor woman became fixed and haggard. They lighted on Joseph's hands.

"You have blood on your hands!" she cried. "Whose blood is it? Joseph, tell me that! Whose blood is it?"

The Chouan's first movement was to hide his hands, but he thought better of it, and brazened the matter out.

"That blood," he answered, his face, which had been pale, becoming purple, "is the blood of a traitor to his God, his country, and his king. It is the blood of a man who forgot that the Blues had sent his father to the scaffold and his brother to the galleys,--a man who did not shrink from taking service with the Blues."

"You have killed my husband! you have murdered your brother!" cried Marianne, facing Joseph with savage violence.

"No, I did not."

"You lie."

"I swear I did not."

"Then if you swear you did not, swear also that you will help me to avenge him."

"Help you to avenge him! I, Joseph Picaut? Never!" said the Chouan, in a determined voice. "For though I did not kill him, I approved of those who did; and if I had been in their place, though he were my brother, I swear by our Lord that I would have done as they did."

"Repeat that," said Marianne; "for I hope I did not hear you right."

The Chouan repeated his speech, word for word.

"Then I curse you, as I curse them!" cried Marianne, raising her hand with a terrible gesture above her brother-in-law's head. "That vengeance which you refuse to take, in which I now include you,--you, your brother's murderer in heart, if not in deed,--God and I will accomplish together; and if God fails me, then I alone! And now," she added, with an energy which completely subdued the Chouan, "where is he? What have they done with his body? Speak! You intend to return me his body, don't you?"

"When I got to the place, after hearing the guns," said Joseph, "he was still alive. I took him in my arms to bring him here, but he died on the way."

"And then you threw him into the ditch like a dog, you Cain! Oh! I wouldn't believe that story when I read it in the Bible!"

"No, I did not," said Joseph; "I have laid him in the orchard."

"My God! my God!" cried the poor woman, whose whole body was shaken with a convulsive movement. "Perhaps you are mistaken, Joseph; perhaps he still breathes, and we may save him. Come, Joseph, come! If we find him living I'll forgive you for being friends with your brother's murderers."

She unhooked the lamp, and sprang toward the door. But instead of following her, Joseph Picaut, who for the last few moments had been listening to a noise without, hearing that the sounds--evidently those of a body of marching men--were approaching the cottage, darted from the door, ran round the buildings, jumped the hedge between them and the fields, and took the direction of the forest of

Machecoul, the black masses of which loomed up in the distance.

Poor Marianne, left alone, ran hither and thither in the orchard. Bewildered and almost maddened, she swung her lamp about her, forgetting to look in the circle of light it threw, and fancying that her eyes must pierce the darkness to find her husband. Suddenly, passing a spot she had passed already once or twice, she stumbled and nearly fell. Her hand, stretched out to save herself from the ground, came in contact with a human body.

She gave a great cry and threw herself on the corpse, clasping it tightly. Then, lifting it in her arms, as she might, under other circumstances, have lifted a child, she carried her husband's body into the cottage and laid it on the bed.

In spite of the jarring relations of the two families, Joseph's wife came into Pascal's room. Seeing the body of her brother-in-law, she fell upon her knees beside the bed and sobbed.

Marianne took the light her sister-in-law brought with her--for hers was left in the orchard--and turned it full upon her husband's face. His mouth and eyes were open, as though he still lived. His wife put her hand eagerly upon his heart, but it did not beat. Then, turning to her sister-in-law, who was weeping and praying beside her, the widow of Pascal Picaut, with blood-shot eyes flaming like firebrands, cried out:--

"Behold what the Chouans have done to my husband,--what Joseph has done to his brother! Well, here upon this body, I swear to have no peace nor rest until those murderers have paid the price of blood."

"You shall not wait long, poor woman, or I'll lose my name," said a man's voice behind her.

Both women turned round and saw an officer wrapped in a cloak, who had entered without their hearing him. Bayonets were glittering in the darkness outside the door, and they now heard the snorting of horses who snuffed the blood.

"Who are you?" asked Marianne.

"An old soldier, like your husband,--one who has seen battlefields enough to have the right to tell you not to lament the death of one who dies for his country, but to avenge him."

"I do not lament, monsieur," replied the widow, raising her head, and shaking back her fallen hair. "What brings you to this cottage at the same time as death?"

"Your husband was to serve as guide to an expedition that is important for the peace and safety of your unhappy country. This expedition may prevent the flow of blood and the destruction of many lives for a lost cause. Can you give me another guide to replace him?"

"Shall you meet the Chouans on your expedition?" asked Marianne.

"Probably we shall," replied the officer.

"Then I will guide you," said the widow, unhooking her husband's gun, which was hanging above the mantel. "Where do you wish to go? I will take you. You can pay me in cartridges."

"We wish to go to the château de Souday."

"Very good; I can guide you. I know the way."

Casting a last look at her husband's body, the widow of Pascal Picaut left the house, followed by the general. The wife of Joseph Picaut remained on her knees, praying, beside the corpse of her brother-in-law.

XXV.

IN WHICH LOVE LENDS POLITICAL OPINIONS TO THOSE WHO HAVE NONE.

We left the young Baron Michel on the verge of coming to a great resolution. Only, just as he was about to act upon it, he heard steps outside his room. Instantly he

throw himself on his bed and closed his eyes, keeping his ears open.

The steps passed; then a few moments later they repassed his door, but without pausing. They were not those of his mother, nor were they in quest of him. He opened his eyes, sat up on the bed, and began to think. His reflections were serious.

Either he must break away from his mother, whose slightest word was law to him, renounce all the ambitions ideas she centred on him,--ideas which had hitherto been most attractive to his vacillating mind,--he must bid farewell to the honors the dynasty of July was pledged to bestow on the millionaire youth, and plunge into a struggle which would undoubtedly be a bloody one, leading to confiscation, exile, and death, while his own good sense and judgment told him it was futile; or else he must resign himself and give up Mary.

Let us say at once that Michel, although he reflected, did not hesitate. Obstinacy is the first outcome of weakness, which is capable of being obstinate even to ferocity. Besides, too many other good reasons spurred the young baron to allow him to succumb.

In the first place, duty and honor both required him to warn the Comte de Bonneville of the dangers that might threaten him and the person who was with him. Michel already reproached himself for his delay in doing so.

Accordingly, after a few moments' careful reflection, Michel decided on his course. In spite of his mother's watchfulness, he had read novels enough to know that if occasion came, a simple pair of sheets could make an all-sufficient ladder. Naturally enough, this was the first thought that came into his mind. Unfortunately, the windows of his bedroom were directly over those of the kitchen, where he would infallibly be seen when he fluttered down through mid-air, although, as we have said, darkness was just beginning. Moreover, the height was really so great from his windows to the ground that in spite of his resolution to conquer, at the cost of a thousand dangers, the heart of her whom he loved, he felt cold chills running down

his back at the mere idea of being suspended by such a fragile hold above an abyss.

In front of his windows was a tall Canadian poplar, the branches of which were about six feet from his balcony. To climb down that poplar, inexperienced though he was in all athletic exercises, seemed to him easy enough, but how to reach its branches was a problem; for the young man dared not trust to the elasticity of his limbs and take a spring.

Necessity made him ingenious. He had in his room a quantity of fishing-tackle, which he had lately been using against the carp and roach in the lake of Grand-Lieu,--an innocent pleasure, which maternal solicitude had authorized. He selected a rod, fastened a hook at the end of the line, and put the whole beside the window. Then he went to his bed and took a sheet. At one end of the sheet he tied a candlestick,--he wanted an article with some weight; a candlestick came in his way, and he took a candlestick. He flung this candlestick in such a way that it fell on the other side of the stoutest limb of the poplar. Then with his hook and line he fished in the end of the sheet, and brought it back to him.

After this he tied both ends firmly to the railing of his balcony, and he thus had a sort of suspension-bridge, solid beyond all misadventure, between his window and the poplar. The young man got astride of it, like a sailor on a yard-arm, and gently propelling himself along, he was soon in the tree, and next on the ground. Then, without caring whether he was seen or not, he crossed the lawn at a run and went toward Souday, the road to which he now knew better than any other.

When he reached the heights of Servière he heard musketry, which seemed to come from somewhere between Montaigu and the lake of Grand-Lieu. His emotion was great. The echo of every volley that came to him on the breeze produced a painful commotion in his mind, which reacted on his heart. The sounds evidently indicated danger, perhaps even death to her he loved, and this thought paralyzed him with terror. Then when he reflected that Mary might blame him for the troubles he had

not averted from her head and from those of her father and sister and friends, the tears filled his eyes.

Consequently, instead of slackening speed when he heard the firing, he only thought of quickening it. From a rapid walk he broke into a run, and soon reached the first trees of the forest of Machecoul. There, instead of following the road, which would have delayed him several minutes, he flung himself into a wood-path that he had taken more than once for the very purpose of shortening the way.

Hurrying beneath the dark, overhanging dome of trees, falling sometimes into ditches, stumbling over stones, catching on thorny briers,--so dense was the darkness, so narrow the way,--he presently reached what was called the Devil's Vale. There he was in the act of jumping a brook which runs in the depths of it, when a man, springing abruptly from a clump of gorse, seized him so roughly that he knocked him down into the slimy bed of the brook, pressing the cold muzzle of a pistol to his forehead.

"Not a cry, not a word, or you are a dead man!" said the assailant.

The position was a frightful one for the young baron. The man put a knee on his chest, and held him down, remaining motionless himself, as though he were expecting some one. At last, finding that no one came, he gave the cry of the screech-owl, which was instantly answered from the interior of the wood, and the rapid steps of a man were heard approaching.

"Is that you, Picaut?" said the man whose knee was on Michel's breast.

"No, not Picaut; it is I," said the new-comer.

"Who is 'I'?"

"Jean Oullier."

"Jean Oullier!" cried the other, with such joy that he raised himself partially, and thus relieved, to some extent, his prisoner. "Really and truly you? Did you actually

get away from the red-breeches?"

"Yes, thanks to all of you, my friends. But we have not a minute to lose if we want to escape a great disaster."

"What's to be done? Now that you are free and here with us, all will go well."

"How many men have you?"

"Eight on leaving Montaigu; but the gars of Vieille-Vigne joined us. We must be sixteen or eighteen by this time."

"How many guns?"

"Each man has one."

"Good. Where are they stationed?"

"Along the edge of the forest."

"Bring them together."

"Yes."

"You know the crossway at the Ragots?"

"Like my pocket."

"Wait for the soldiers there, not in ambush but openly. Order fire when they are within twenty paces. Kill all you can,--so much vermin the less."

"Yes. And then?"

"As soon as your guns are discharged separate in two bodies,--one to escape by the path to La Cloutière, the other by the road to Bourgnieux. Fire as you run, and coax them to follow you."

"To get them off their track, hey?"

"Precisely, Guérin; that's it."

"Yes; but--you?"

"I must get to Souday. I ought to be there now."

"Oh, oh, Jean Oullier!" exclaimed the peasant, doubtfully.

"Well, what?" asked Jean Oullier. "Does any one dare to distrust me?"

"No one says they distrust you; they only say they don't trust any one else."

"I tell you I must be at Souday in ten minutes, and when Jean Oullier says 'I must,' it is because it must be done. If you can delay the soldiers half an hour that's all I want."

"Jean Oullier! Jean Oullier!"

"What?"

"Suppose I can't make the gars wait for the soldiers in the open?"

"Order them in the name of the good God."

"If it were you who ordered them they would obey; but me-- Besides, there's Joseph Picaut among them, and you know Joseph Picaut will only do as he chooses."

"But if I don't go to Souday I have no one to send."

"Let me go, Monsieur Jean Oullier," said a voice from the earth.

"Who spoke?" said the wolf-keeper.

"A prisoner I have just made," said Guérin.

"What's his name?"

"I did not ask his name."

"I am the Baron de la Logerie," said the young man, managing to sit up; for the Chouan's grip was loosened and he had more freedom to move and breathe.

"Ah! Michel's son! You here!" muttered Jean Oullier, in a savage voice.

"Yes. When Monsieur Guérin stopped me I was on my way to Souday to warn my friend Bonneville and Petit-Pierre that their presence in the château was known."

"How came you to know that?"

"I heard it last evening. I overheard a conversation between my mother and

Courtin."

"Then why, as you had such fine intentions, didn't you go sooner to warn your friend?" retorted Jean Oullier, in a tone of doubt and also of sarcasm.

"Because the baroness locked me into my room, and that room is on the second floor, and I could not get out till to-night through the window, and then at the risk of my life."

Jean Oullier reflected a moment. His prejudice against all that came from la Logerie was so intense, his hatred against all that bore the name of Michel so deep, that he could not endure to accept a service from the young man. In fact, in spite of the latter's ingenuous frankness, the distrustful Vendéan suspected that such a show of good-will meant treachery. He knew, however, that Guérin was right, and that he alone in a crucial moment could give the Chouans confidence enough in themselves to let the enemy come openly up to them, and therefore that he alone could delay their march to Souday. On the other hand, he felt that Michel could explain to the Comte de Bonneville better than any peasant the danger that threatened him, and so he resigned himself, though sulkily, to be under an obligation to one of the Michel family.

"Ah, wolf-cub!" he muttered, "I can't help myself." Then aloud, "Very well, so be it. Go!" he said; "but have you the legs to do it?"

"Steel legs."

"Hum!" grunted Jean Oullier.

"If Mademoiselle Bertha were here she would certify to them."

"Mademoiselle Bertha!" exclaimed Jean Oullier, frowning.

"Yes; I fetched the doctor for old Tinguy, and I took only fifty minutes to go seven miles and a half there and back."

Jean Oullier shook his head like a man who is far from being satisfied.

"Do you look after your enemies," said Michel, "and rely on me. If it takes you ten minutes to get to Souday it will take me five, I'll answer for that."

And the young man shook from his clothes the mud and slime with which he was covered, and prepared to depart.

"Do you know the way?" asked Jean Oullier.

"Know the way! As well as I do the paths at la Logerie." And darting off in the direction of Souday, he called back, "Good luck to you, Monsieur Jean Oullier!"

Jean Oullier stood thoughtful a moment. The knowledge the young baron declared he possessed of the neighborhood of the château greatly annoyed him.

"Well, well," he growled at last, "we'll put that in order when we get time." Then addressing Guérin, "Come," said he, "call up the gars."

The Chouan took off one of his wooden shoes and putting it to his mouth he blew into it in a way that exactly represented the howling of wolves.

"Do you think they'll hear that?" asked Jean Oullier.

"Of course they will. I chose the farthest place to windward to make sure of it."

"Then we had better not wait for them here. Let us get to the Ragot crossways. Keep on calling as you go along; we shall gain time that way."

"How much time have we in advance of the soldiers?" asked Guérin, following Jean Oullier rapidly through the brake.

"A good half-hour and more. They have halted at the farm of Pichardière."

"Pichardière!" exclaimed Guérin.

"Yes. They have probably waked up Pascal Picaut, who will guide them. He is a man to do that, isn't he?"

"Pascal Picaut won't serve as guide to any one. He'll never wake up again," said Guérin, gloomily.

"Ah!" exclaimed Jean Oullier; "then it was he just now, was it?"

"Yes, it was he."

"Did you kill him?"

"He struggled and called for help. The soldiers were within gunshot of us; we had to kill him."

"Poor Pascal!" said Jean Oullier.

"Yes," said Guérin, "though he belonged to the scoundrels, he was a fine man."

"And his brother?" asked Jean Oullier.

"His brother?"

"Yes, Joseph."

"He stood looking on."

Jean Oullier shook himself like a wolf who receives a charge of buckshot in the flank. That powerful nature accepted all the consequences of the terrible struggle which is the natural outcome of civil wars, but he had not foreseen this horror, and he shuddered at the thought of it. To conceal his emotion from Guérin he hurried his steps and bounded through the undergrowth as rapidly as though following his hounds.

Guérin, who stopped from time to time to howl in his shoe, had some trouble in following. Suddenly he heard Jean Oullier give a low whistle warning him to halt.

They were then at a part of the forest called the springs of Baugé, only a short distance from the crossways.

XXVI.

THE SPRINGS OF BAUGÉ.

The springs of Baugé are realty marshes, or rather a marsh, above which the road leading to Souday rises steeply. It is one of the most abrupt ascents of this mountain

forest.

The column of the "red-breeches," as Guérin called the soldiers, was obliged to first cross the marsh and then ascend the steep incline. Jean Oullier had reached the part of the road where it crosses this bog on piles before the ascent begins. From there he had whistled to Guérin, who found him apparently reflecting.

"What are you thinking of?" asked Guérin.

"I am thinking that perhaps this is a better place than the crossways," replied Jean Oullier.

"Yes," said Guérin; "for here's a wagon behind which we can ambush."

Jean Oullier, who had not before noticed it, now examined the object his companion pointed out to him. It was a heavy cart loaded with wood, which the driver had left for the night beside the marsh, fearing, no doubt, to cross the narrow causeway after dusk.

"I have an idea," said Jean Oullier, looking alternately at the cart and at the hill, which rose like a dark rampart on the other side of the bog. "Only, they must--"

He looked all about him.

"Who must? What?"

"The gars must be here."

"They are here," said Guérin. "See, here's Patry, the two Gambier brothers, and there are the Vieille-Vigne men and Joseph Picaut."

Jean Oullier turned his back so as not to see the latter.

It was true enough; the Chouans were flocking up on all sides. First one and then another came from behind each bush and hedge. Soon they were all collected.

"Gars!" said Jean Oullier, addressing them, "Ever since La Vendée was La Vendée,--that is, ever since she has fought for her principles,--her children have never been called upon to show their courage and their faith more than they are

to-day. If we cannot now stop the march of Louis Philippe's soldiers great misfortunes will happen; I tell you, my sons, that all the glory which covers the name of La Vendée will be wiped out. As for me, I am resolved to leave my bones in the bog of Baugé sooner than allow that infernal column of troops to go beyond it."

"So are we, Jean Oullier!" cried many voices.

"Good! that is what I expected from men who followed us from Montaigu to deliver me, and who succeeded. Come, to begin with, help me to drag this cart to the top of the hill."

"We'll try," said the Vendéans.

Jean Oullier put himself at their head, and the heavy vehicle, pushed from behind or by the wheels by some, while eight or ten pulled it by the shafts, crossed the narrow causeway, and was hoisted rather than dragged to the summit of the steep embankment. There Jean Oullier wedged the wheels with stones to prevent it from running backward by its own weight down the steep rise it had gone up with so much difficulty.

"Now," he said, "put yourselves in ambush each side of the marsh, half to the right, half to the left, and when the time comes,--that's to say, when I shout 'Fire!'--fire instantly. If the soldiers turn to pursue you, as I hope they may, retreat toward Grand-Lieu, striving to lead them on as best you can away from Souday, which they are aiming for. If, on the contrary, they continue their way we will all wait for them at the Ragot crossways. There we must stand firm, and die at our posts."

The Chouans instantly disappeared into their hiding-places on either side the marsh, and Jean Oullier was left alone with Guérin. Thereupon, he flung himself flat on his stomach with his ear to the ground and listened.

"They are coming," he said. "They are following the road to Souday as if they knew it. Who the devil can be guiding them, now that Pascal Picaut is dead?"

"They must have found some peasant and compelled him."

"Then that's another we shall have to get rid of. If they once get into the depths of the forest of Machecoul without a guide, not one of them will ever return to Montaigu."

"Ah, ça, Jean Oullier!" exclaimed Guérin, suddenly. "You haven't any weapon!"

"I!" said the old Vendéan, laughing between his teeth. "I've a weapon that can bring down more men than your carbine; and in ten minutes, if everything goes as I hope it will, there'll be plenty of guns to pick up beside the marsh."

So saying, Jean Oullier again went up the ascent, which he had partly descended to explain to the men his plan of battle, and reached the cart. It was high time. As he gained the summit he heard on the opposite hillside, which led down to the marsh, the sound of stones rolling from the feet of horses, and he saw two or three flashes of light from their iron shoes. The air was quivering, as it does in the night-time, with the approach of a body of armed men.

"Come, go down and join the rest," he said to Guérin. "I stay here."

"What are you going to do?"

"You'll see presently."

Guérin obeyed. Jean Oullier crept under the cart and waited. Guérin had hardly taken his place among his comrades when the two leading chasseurs of the advanced-guard came upon the edge of the marsh. Seeing the difficulties before them, they stopped and hesitated.

"Straight on!" cried a firm voice, although it had a feminine ring. "Straight on!"

The two chasseurs advanced, and seeing the narrow causeway built on piles they crossed it and began the ascent, coming nearer and nearer to the cart, and, consequently, to Jean Oullier.

When they were twenty steps away from him, Jean Oullier, still beneath the cart,

hung himself by his hands to the axletree, and resting his feet on the front bars of the wagon, remained quite motionless. The chasseurs were presently beside the cart. They examined it carefully from their saddles, and seeing, of course, nothing of the man beneath it or anything else to excite distrust, they continued their way.

The main column was by this time at the edge of the marsh. The widow Picaut passed first, then the general, then the chasseurs. The marsh was crossed in that order.

But just as they reached the foot of the slope a thundering sound was heard from the summit of the rise they were about to ascend; the ground shook under their feet, and a sort of avalanche came tearing down the hill with the rapidity of a thunderbolt.

"Stand aside!" cried Dermoncourt, in a voice which rose above that horrible uproar.

Seizing the widow by the arm, he spurred his horse into the bushes. The general's first thought was for his guide, who was, for the moment, the most precious thing he had. The guide and he were safe.

But the soldiers for the most part did not have time to obey their leader. Paralyzed by the strange noise they heard and not knowing what enemy to look for, blinded by the darkness, and feeling danger everywhere about them, they held to the road, where the cart (for of course it was the cart, violently impelled by Jean Oullier from the top of the steep embankment) cut its way through them like a monstrous cannon-ball, killing those the wheels ran over, and wounding others with its logs and splinters.

A moment of stupefaction followed this catastrophe, but it could not check Dermoncourt.

"Forward, men!" he cried, "and let's get out of this cut-throat place!"

At the same moment a voice, not less powerful than his own, called out:--

"Fire, my gars!"

A flash issued from every bush on either side of the marsh and a rain of balls came pelting down among the little troop. The voice that ordered the volley resounded from its front, but the shots came from its rear. The general, an old war-wolf, as sly and wary as Jean Oullier himself, saw through the man[oe]uvre.

"Forward!" he cried; "don't lose time answering them. Forward! forward!"

The column continued to advance, and in spite of the volleys which followed it, reached the top of the hill.

While the general and his men were making the ascent Jean Oullier, hiding among the underbrush, went rapidly down the hill and joined his companions.

"Bravo!" said Guérin. "Ah! if we had only ten arms like yours and a few such wood-carts as that we could get rid of this cursed army in a very short time."

"Hum!" growled Jean Oullier, "I'm not as satisfied as you. I hoped to turn them back, but we have not done it. It looks to me as if they were keeping on their way. To the crossroads, now, and as fast as our legs will take us!"

"Who says the red-breeches are keeping on their way?" asked a voice.

Jean Oullier went to the boggy path whence the voice had come, and recognized Joseph Picaut. The Vendéan, kneeling on the ground, with his gun beside him, was conscientiously emptying the pockets of three soldiers whom Jean Oullier's mighty projectile had knocked over and crushed to death. The wolf-keeper turned away with an expression of disgust.

"Listen to Joseph," said Guérin, in a low voice to Jean Oullier. "You had better listen to him, for he sees by night like the cats, and his advice is not to be despised."

"Well, I say," said Joseph Picaut, putting his plunder into a canvas bag he always carried with him,--"I say that since the Blues reached the top of the embankment they haven't budged. You haven't any ears, you fellows, or you would hear them stamping up there like sheep in a fold. If you don't hear them, I do."

"Let us make sure of that," said Jean Oullier to Guérin, thus avoiding a reply to Joseph.

"You are right, Jean Oullier, and I'll go myself," replied Guérin.

The Vendéan crossed the marsh, crept through the reeds, and went half way up the ascent, crawling on his stomach like a snake among the rocks, and gliding so gently under the bushes that they scarcely stirred as he passed. When he was only about thirty paces from the summit he stood up, put his hat on the end of a long stick, and waved it above his head. Instantly a shot from the summit sent it spinning a hundred feet below its owner.

"He was right," said Jean Oullier, who heard the shot. "But what is hindering them? Is their guide killed?"

"Their guide is not killed," said Joseph Picaut, in a savage voice.

"Did you see him?" asked another voice, for Jean Oullier seemed determined not to speak to Joseph Picaut.

"Yes," replied the Chouan.

"Did you recognize him?"

"Yes."

"Then it must be," said Jean Oullier, as if speaking to himself, "that they wanted to get away from the marsh and bivouac behind those rocks, where they are safe from our guns. No doubt they will stay there till morning."

Presently a few lights were seen flickering on the height.

Little by little they increased in number and in size, until four or five camp fires lit up with a ruddy glow the sparse vegetation which grew among the rocks.

"This is very strange if their guide is still with them," said Jean Oullier. "However, as they are certain to go by the Ragot crossways in any case, take your men there, Guérin," he said to the Chouan, who by this time had returned to his side.

"Very good," said the latter.

"If they continue their way, you know what you have to do; if, on the contrary, they have really bivouacked up there, you can let them take their ease beside their fires. It is useless to attack them."

"Why so?" asked Joseph Picaut.

Thus directly questioned as to his own order, Jean Oullier was forced to reply.

"Because," he said, "it is a crime to uselessly expose the lives of brave men."

"Say rather--"

"What?" demanded the old keeper, violently.

"Say 'Because my masters, the nobles whose servant I am, no longer want the lives of those brave men.' Say that, and you'll tell the truth, Jean Oullier."

"Who dares to say that Jean Oullier lies?" asked the wolf-keeper, frowning.

"I!" said Joseph Picaut.

Jean Oullier set his teeth, but contained himself. He seemed resolved to have neither friendship nor quarrel with the man.

"I!" repeated Picaut,--"I say that it is not out of love for our bodies that you want to prevent us from profiting by our victory, but because all you have made us fight for is to keep the red-breeches from pillaging the castle of Souday."

"Joseph Picaut," replied Jean Oullier, calmly, "though we both wear the white cockade we do not follow the same paths nor work for the same ends. I have always thought that no matter how their opinions may differ, brothers are brothers, and it grieves me to see the blood of my brethren uselessly shed. As for my relation to my masters I have always regarded humility as the first duty of a Christian, above all when that Christian is a poor peasant, as I am, and as you are. Also I consider obedience the most imperative duty of a soldier. I know that you don't think as I do,--so much the worse for you! Under other circumstances I might have made you

repent for what you have just said; but at this moment I do not belong to myself. You may thank God for that."

"Well," said Joseph Picaut, sneering, "when you return into possession of yourself you'll know where to find me, Jean Oullier; you won't have far to look." Then, turning to the little troop of men, he went on: "Now, if there are any among you who think it is folly to course the hare when you can take it in its form, follow me."

He started as if to go. No one stirred; no one even answered him. Joseph Picaut, seeing that total silence followed his proposal, made an angry gesture and disappeared into the thicket.

Jean Oullier, taking Picaut's words for mere boastfulness, shrugged his shoulders.

"Come, you fellows," he said to the Chouans, "be off to the Ragot crossways, and quickly, too. Follow the bed of the brook to the clearing at Quatre-Vents; from there it will take you fifteen minutes to get to the crossways."

"Where are you going, Jean Oullier?" said Guérin.

"To Souday," said the wolf-keeper. "I must make sure that Michel did his errand."

The little band departed obediently, following, as Jean Oullier told them, the course of the rivulet. The old keeper was left alone. He listened for a few moments to the sound of the water which the Chouans splashed as they marched; but that noise soon mingled with the rippling and dash of the little rapids, and Jean Oullier turned his head in the direction of the soldiers.

The rocks on which the column had halted formed a chain, running from east to west in the direction of Souday. On the east this chain ended in a gentle slope, which came down to the rivulet up which the Chouans had just passed in order to turn the encampment of the troops. On the west it stretched for a mile and a half or more, and the nearer it came to Souday the higher and more jagged grew the rocks, the steeper and more denuded of vegetation were the slopes. On this side the miniature mountain ended in an actual precipice formed by enormous perpendicular rocks,

which overhung the rivulet that washed their base. Once or twice in his life Jean Oullier had risked the descent of this precipice to gain upon a boar his dogs were pursuing. It was done by a path scarcely a foot wide, hidden among the gorse and called the Viette des Biques, meaning "the goat-path." The way was known to a few hunters only. Jean Oullier himself had been exposed to such danger in descending it that he considered it impossible that the troops should attempt it in the darkness.

If the enemy's column intended to continue its aggressive movement on Souday it must either take this goat-path, or meet the Chouans at the Ragot crossways, or return upon its steps and follow the brook up which the Chouans had just gone. All this seemed to throw the enemy into his hands, and yet Jean Oullier, by a sort of presentiment, was uneasy.

It seemed to him extraordinary that Dermoncourt had yielded to the first attack and resigned so quickly and readily his evident intention of advancing to Souday. Instead of continuing his own way to Souday, as he had told Guérin he should, he remained where he was, watching the heights, when suddenly he observed that the fires were going down and the light they threw upon the rocks was growing fainter and fainter.

Jean Oullier's decision was made in a moment. He darted along the same path Guérin had taken to observe the enemy, and used the same tactics; only, he did not stop, as Guérin had stopped, half-way up the ascent. He continued to crawl up until he was at the foot of the blocks of stone which surrounded the flat summit.

There he listened; he heard no noise. Then, rising cautiously to his feet in a space between two large rocks, he looked before him and saw nothing. The place was solitary. The fires were deserted; the furze with which they were built was crackling and going out. Jean Oullier climbed the rocks and dropped into the space where he had supposed the soldiers were. Not a man was there.

He gave a terrible cry of rage and disappointment, and shouted to his companions

below to return and follow him. Then, with the swiftness of a hunted deer, straining his iron muscles to the utmost, he rushed along the summit of the rocks in the direction of Souday. No doubt remained in his mind. Some unknown guide, unknown except to Joseph Picaut, had led the soldiers to the Viette des Biques.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of the way, Jean Oullier, slipping on the flat rocks covered with mosses, striking against the granite blocks which rose in his path like sentinels, catching his feet in the briers which tore his flesh as he rushed through them,--Jean Oullier, we say, was not ten minutes in getting over the whole length of the little chain. When he reached its extremity he climbed the last line of rocks which overlooked the valley, and saw the soldiers.

They were just descending the slope of the hill, having risked the path of the Viette des Biques. The line of their torches could be seen filing cautiously along by the edge of the abyss. Jean Oullier clung to the enormous stone on which he stood and shook it, hoping to detach it and send it rolling on their heads. But all such efforts of mad anger were powerless, and only a mocking laugh replied to his imprecations. He turned round and looked behind him, thinking that Satan himself could alone laugh thus. The laugher was Joseph Picaut.

"Well, Jean Oullier," he said, coming out of a clump of gorse, "my scent was better than yours; you ought to have followed me. As it was, you made me lose my time. I got here too late; and your friends will be cooked in spite of me."

"My God! my God!" cried Jean Oullier, grasping his hair with both hands. "Who could have guided them down that path?"

"Whoever did guide them down shall never come up again, either by this path or any other," said Joseph Picaut. "Look at that guide now, Jean Oullier, if you want to see her living."

Jean Oullier leaned forward once more. The soldiers had crossed the rivulet and were gathered round the general. In the midst of them, not a hundred paces from the

two men, though separated from them by the precipice, they saw a woman with dishevelled hair, who was pointing out to the general with her finger the path he must now take.

"Marianne Picaut!" exclaimed Jean Oullier.

The Chouan made no answer, but he raised his gun to his shoulder and slowly aimed it. Jean Oullier turned round when he heard the click of the trigger, and as the Chouan fired he threw up the muzzle of the gun.

"Wretch!" he cried; "give her time to bury your brother!"

The ball was fired into space.

"Damn you!" cried Joseph Picaut, furiously, seizing his gun by the barrel, and giving a terrible blow with the stock on Jean Oullier's head. "I treat Whites like you as I would Blues!"

In spite of his Herculean strength the blow was so violent that it brought the old Vendéan to his knees; then, not able to maintain himself in that position, he rolled over the edge of the precipice. As he fell he caught instinctively at a tuft of gorze; but he soon felt it yielding under the weight of his body.

Bewildered as he was, he did not altogether lose consciousness, and, expecting every moment to feel the slender shoots which alone supported him above the abyss give way, he commended his soul to God. At that instant he heard shots from the gorse and saw through his half-closed eyelids the flash of arms. Hoping that the Chouans had returned, led by Guérin, he tried to call out, but his voice felt imprisoned in his chest, and he could not raise the leaden hand which seemed to hold the breath from his lips. He was like a man in a frightful nightmare; and the pain the effort cost him was so violent that he fancied--forgetting the blow he had received--that his forehead was sweating blood.

Little by little his strength abandoned him. His fingers weakened, his muscles relaxed, and the agony he endured became so terrible that he believed he must

voluntarily let go the branches which alone held him above the void. Soon he felt himself attracted to the abyss below him by an irresistible impulse. His fingers loosened their last hold; but at the very moment when he imagined he should hear the air whistling and whirling as he fell through it, and feel the jagged points of rocks tearing his body as he passed, a pair of vigorous arms caught him and bore him to a narrow platform which overhung the precipice at a little distance.

He was saved! But he knew at once that the arms that were brutally handling him were not those of friends.

XXVII.

THE GUESTS AT SOUDAY.

The day after the arrival of the Comte de Bonneville and his companion at the château de Souday, the marquis returned from his expedition, or rather, his conference. As he got off his horse it was quite evident that the worthy gentleman was in a savage ill-humor.

He growled at his daughters, who had not come even so far as the door to meet him; he swore at Jean Oullier, who had taken the liberty to go off to the fair at Montaigu without his permission; he quarrelled with the cook, who, in the absence of the major-domo, came forward to hold his stirrup, and instead of grasping the one to the right, pulled with all her strength on the one to the left, thus obliging the marquis to get off on the wrong side of his horse and away from the portico.

When he reached the salon M. de Souday's wrath was still exhaling itself in monosyllables of such vehemence that Bertha and Mary, accustomed as their ears were to the freedom of language the old émigré allowed himself, did not, on this occasion, know which way to look.

In vain they attempted to coax him and smooth his angry brow. Nothing did any good; and the marquis, as he warmed his feet before the fire and switched his

top-boots with his riding-whip, seemed to regret bitterly that Messieurs Blank and Blank were not the top-boots themselves, to whom he addressed, as he flourished his whip, some very offensive epithets indeed.

The fact is, the marquis was furious. For some time past he had been sadly conscious that the pleasures of the chase were beginning to pall upon him; also he had found himself yawning over the whist which regularly concluded his evenings. The joys of trumps and odd tricks were beginning to be insipid, and life at Souday threatened to become distasteful to him. Besides, for the last ten years his legs had never felt as elastic as they did now. Never had his lungs breathed freer, or his brain been so active and enterprising. He was just entering that Saint-Martin's summer for old men,--the period when their faculties sparkle with a brighter gleam before paling, and their bodies gather strength as if to prepare for the final struggle. The marquis, feeling himself more lively, more fit than he had been for many a year, growing restless in the little circle of his daily avocations, now insufficient to occupy him, and conscious, alas! that ennui was creeping over him, took it into his head that a new Vendée would be admirably suited to his renewed youth, and did not doubt that he should find in the adventurous life of a partisan those earlier enjoyments the very memory of which was the charm of his old age.

He had therefore hailed with enthusiasm the prospect of a new uprising and call to arms. A political commotion of that kind, coming as it did, proved to him once more what he had often in his placid and naïve egotism believed,--that the world was created and managed for the satisfaction and benefit of so worthy a gentleman as M. le Marquis de Souday.

But he had found among his co-royalists a lukewarmness and a disposition to procrastinate which fairly exasperated him. Some declared that the public mind was not yet ripe for any movement; others that it was imprudent to attempt anything unless assured that the army would side with legitimacy; others, again, insisted that

religious and political enthusiasm was dying out among the peasantry, and that it would be difficult to rouse them to a new war. The heroic marquis, who could not comprehend why all France should not be ready when a small campaign would be so very agreeable to him,--when Jean Oullier had burnished up his best carbine, and his daughters had embroidered for him a scarf and a bloody heart,--the marquis, we say, had just quarrelled vehemently with his friends the Vendéan leaders, and leaving the meeting abruptly, had returned to the château without listening to reason.

Mary, who knew to what excess her father respected the duty of hospitality, profited by a lull in his ill humor to tell him gently of the arrival of the Comte de Bonneville at the château, hoping in this way to create a diversion for his mind.

"Bonneville! Bonneville! And who may that be?" growled the irascible old fellow. "Bonneville? Some cabbage-planter or lawyer or civilian who has jumped into epaulets, some talker who can't fire anything but words, a dilettante who'll tell me we ought to wait and let Philippe waste his popularity! Popularity, indeed! As if the thing to do were not to turn that popularity on our own king!"

"I see that Monsieur le marquis is for taking arms immediately," said a soft and flute-like voice beside him.

The marquis turned round hastily and beheld a very young man, dressed as a peasant, who was leaning, like himself, against the chimney-piece, and warming his feet before the fire. The stranger had entered the room by a side door, and the marquis, whose back was toward him as he entered, being carried away by the heat of his wrath and his imprecations, paid no heed to the signs his daughters made to warn him of the presence of a guest.

Petit-Pierre, for it was he, seemed to be about sixteen or eighteen years old; but he was very slender and frail for his years. His face was pale, and the long black hair which framed it made it seem whiter still; his large blue eyes beamed with courage and intellect; his mouth, which was delicate and curled slightly upward at the

corners, was now smiling with a mischievous expression; the chin, strongly defined and prominent, indicated unusual strength of will; while a slightly aquiline nose completed a cast of countenance, the distinction of which contrasted strangely with the clothes he wore.

"Monsieur Petit-Pierre," said Bertha, taking the hand of the new-comer, and presenting him to her father.

The marquis made a profound bow, to which the young man replied with a graceful salutation. The old émigré was not very much deceived by the dress and name of Petit-Pierre. The great war had long accustomed him to the use of nicknames and aliases by which men of high birth concealed their rank, and the disguises under which they hid their natural bearing; but what did puzzle him was the extreme youth of his unexpected guest.

"I am happy, monsieur," he said, "if my daughters have been able to be of service to you and Monsieur de Bonneville; but all the same I regret that I was absent from home at the time of your arrival. If it were not for an extremely unpleasant interview with some gentlemen of my political opinions, I should have had the honor to put my poor castle at your service myself. However, I hope my little chatterers have been good substitutes, and that nothing our limited means can procure has been spared to make your stay as comfortable as it can be."

"Your hospitality, Monsieur le marquis, can only gain in the hands of such charming substitutes," said Petit-Pierre, gallantly.

"Humph!" said the marquis, pushing out his lower lip; "in other times than these we are in, my daughters ought to be able to procure for their guests some amusement. Bertha, here, knows how to follow a trail, and can turn a boar as well as any one. Mary, on the other hand, hasn't her equal for knowing the corner of the marsh where the snipe are. But except for a sound knowledge of whist, which they get from me, I regard them as altogether unfit to do the honors of a salon; and here we are, for the

present, shut up with nothing to do but poke the fire." So saying, Monsieur de Souday gave a vigorous kick to the logs on the hearth, proving that his anger was not yet over.

"I think few women at court possess more grace and distinction than these young ladies; and I assure you that none unite with those qualities such nobility of heart and feeling as your daughters, Monsieur le marquis, have shown to us."

"Court?" said the marquis, interrogatively, looking with some surprise at Petit-Pierre.

Petit-Pierre colored and smiled deprecatingly, like an actor who blunders before a friendly audience.

"I spoke, of course, on presumption, Monsieur le marquis," he said, with an embarrassment that was obviously factitious. "I said the court, because that is the sphere where your daughters' name would naturally place them, and also, because it is there I should like to see them."

The marquis colored because he had made his guest color. He had just involuntarily meddled with the incognito the latter seemed anxious to preserve, and the exquisite politeness of the old gentleman reproached him bitterly for such a fault.

Petit-Pierre hastened to add:--

"I was saying to you, Monsieur le marquis, when these young ladies did me the honor to introduce us, that you seem to be one of those who desire an immediate call to arms."

"I should think so! parbleu! and I am willing to say so to you, monsieur, who, as I see, are one of us--"

Petit-Pierre nodded in affirmation.

"Yes, that is my desire," continued the marquis; "but no matter what I say and do, I can't get any one to believe an old man who scorched his skin in the terrible fire

which laid waste the country from 1793 to 1797. No! they listen to a pack of gabblers, lawyers without a brief, fine dandies who dare not sleep in the open air for fear of spoiling their clothes, milk-sops, fellows," added the marquis, kicking at the logs, which revenged themselves by showering his boots with sparks,--"fellows who--"

"Papa!" said Mary, gently, observing a furtive smile on Petit-Pierre's face. "Papa, do be calm!"

"No, I shall not be calm," continued the fiery old gentleman. "Everything was ready. Jean Oullier assured me that my division was boiling over with enthusiasm; and now the affair is adjourned over from the 14th of May to the Greek Calends!"

"Patience, Monsieur le marquis," said Petit-Pierre, "the time will soon be here."

"Patience! patience! that's easy for you to say," replied the marquis, sighing. "You are young, and you have time enough to wait; but I-- Who knows if God will grant me days enough to unfurl the good old flag I fought under so gayly once upon a time?"

Petit-Pierre was touched by the old man's regret.

"But have you not heard, Monsieur le marquis, for I have," he said, "that the call to arms was only postponed because of the uncertainty that exists as to the arrival of the princess?"

This speech seemed to increase the marquis's ill-humor.

"Let me alone, young man," he said, in an angry tone. "Don't I know the meaning of that old joke? During the five years that I fought to the death in La Vendée were not they always telling us that a royal personage would draw his sword and rally all ambitions round him? Didn't I myself, with many others, wait for the Comte d'Artois to land on the shores of the Île Dieu on the 2d of October? We shall no more see the Duchesse de Berry in 1832 than we saw the Comte d'Artois in 1796. That, however, will not prevent me from getting myself killed on their behalf, as becomes a loyal

gentleman."

"Monsieur le Marquis de Souday," said Petit-Pierre, in a voice of strange emotion, "I swear to you, myself, that if the Duchesse de Berry had nothing more than a nutshell at her command she would cross the seas and place herself under Charette's banner, borne by a hand so valiant and so noble. I swear to you that she will come now, if not to conquer, at least to die with those who have risen to defend the rights of her son."

There was such energy and determination in the tone with which he spoke, and it seemed so extraordinary that such words should issue from the lips of a little lad of sixteen, that the marquis looked him in the face with extreme surprise.

"Who are you?" he said, giving way to his astonishment. "By what right do you speak thus of the intentions of her Royal Highness, and pledge your word for her, young man--or rather, child?"

"I think, Monsieur le marquis, that Mademoiselle de Souday did me the honor to mention my name when she presented me to you."

"True, Monsieur Petit-Pierre," replied the marquis, confused at his outburst. "I beg your pardon. But," he added conjecturing the youth to be the son of some great personage, "is it indiscreet to ask your opinion as to the present likelihood of a call to arms? Young as you are, you speak with such excellent sense that I do not conceal from you my desire for your opinion."

"My opinion, Monsieur le marquis, can be all the more readily given because I see plainly that it is much the same as yours."

"Really?"

"My opinion--if I may permit myself to give one--"

"Heavens! after the pitiful creatures I heard talk to-night you seem to me as wise as the seven sages of Greece."

"You are too kind. It is my opinion, Monsieur le marquis, that it was most unfortunate we could not rise, as agreed upon, on the night of the 13th and 14th of May."

"That's just what I told them. May I ask your reasons, monsieur?"

"My reasons are these: The soldiers were at that time quartered in the villages, among the inhabitants, scattered here and there, without object and without a flag. Nothing was easier than to surprise and disarm them in a sudden attack."

"Most true; whereas now--"

"Now the order has been given to break up the small encampments and draw into a focus all the scattered military forces and bodies,--not of mere companies and detachments, but of battalions and regiments. We shall now need a pitched battle to reach the results we might have gained by the cost of that one night's sleep."

"That's conclusive!" cried the marquis, enthusiastically, "and I am dreadfully distressed that out of the forty and one reasons I gave my opponents to-night I never thought of that. But," he continued, "that order which you say has been sent to the troops, are you quite sure it has been actually issued?"

"Quite sure," said Petit-Pierre, with the most modest and deferential look he could put upon his face.

The marquis looked at him in stupefaction.

"It is a pity," he went on, "a great pity! However, as you say, my young friend,--you will permit me to give you that title,--it is better to have patience and wait till our new Maria Theresa comes into the midst of her new Hungarians, and meantime to drink to the health of her royal son and his spotless banner. That reminds me that these young ladies must deign to get our breakfast ready, for Jean Oullier has gone off, as some one," he added, with a half-angry look at his daughters, "has taken upon herself to allow him to go to Montaigu without my orders."

"That some one was I, Monsieur le marquis," said Petit-Pierre, whose courteous tone was not quite free from command. "I beg your pardon for having thus employed one of your men; but you were absent, and it was most urgent that we should judge exactly what we had to expect from the temper of the peasantry assembled at Montaigu for the fair."

There was a tone of such easy and natural assurance in that soft, sweet voice, such a consciousness of authority in the person who spoke, that the marquis was speechless. He ran over in his mind the various great personages he could think of who might have a son of this age, and all he managed to say in reply were a few stammered words of acquiescence.

The Comte de Bonneville entered the room at this moment. Petit-Pierre, as the older acquaintance of the two, presented him to the marquis.

The open countenance and frank, joyous manner of the count immediately won upon the old gentleman, already delighted with Petit-Pierre. He dismissed his ill-humor, and vowed not to think any more of the cold hearts and backwardness of his late companions; and he inwardly resolved, as he led his guests to the dining-room, to use all his wit to extract from the Comte de Bonneville the real name of the youth who now chose to pass under the incognito of Petit-Pierre.

XXVIII.

IN WHICH THE MARQUIS DE SOUDAY BITTERLY REGRETS THAT PETIT-PIERRE IS NOT A GENTLEMAN.

The two young men, whom the Marquis de Souday pushed before him, stopped on the threshold of the dining-room door. The aspect of the table was literally formidable.

In the centre rose, like an ancient citadel commanding a town, an enormous pasty of boar's meat and venison. A pike weighing fifteen pounds, three or four chickens in a

stew, and a regular tower of Babel in cutlets flanked this citadel to the north, south, east, and west; and for outposts or picket-guards M. de Souday's cook had surrounded these heavy works with a cordon of dishes, all touching one another, and containing aliments of many kinds,--hors-d'[oe]uvres, entrées, entremets, vegetables, salads, fruits, and marmalades,--all huddled together and heaped in a confusion that was certainly not picturesque, though full of charm for appetites sharpened by the cutting air of the forests of the Mauge region.

"Heavens!" cried Petit-Pierre, drawing back, as we have said, at the sight of such victualling. "You treat poor peasants too royally, Monsieur de Souday."

"Oh, as for that, I have nothing to do with it, my young friend, and you must neither blame me nor thank me. I leave all that to these young ladies. But it is, I hope, unnecessary to say how happy I am that you honor the board of a poor country gentleman."

So saying, the marquis gently impelled Petit-Pierre, who still seemed to hesitate, to approach the table. He yielded to the pressure with some reserve.

"I know I cannot worthily respond to what you expect of me, Monsieur le marquis," he said; "for I must humbly admit to you that I am a very poor eater."

"I understand," said the marquis; "you are accustomed to delicate dishes. As for me, I am a regular peasant, and I prefer good, solid, succulent food, which repairs the waste of the system, to all the dainties of a fine table."

"That's a point I have often heard King Louis XVIII. and the Marquis d'Avaray discuss," said Petit-Pierre.

The Comte de Bonneville touched the youth's arm.

"Then you knew King Louis XVIII. and the Marquis d'Avaray?" said the old gentleman, in much amazement, looking at Petit-Pierre, as if to make sure that the youth was not laughing at him.

"Yes, I knew them well, in my youth," replied Petit-Pierre, simply.

"Hum!" said the marquis, shortly.

They had now taken their places round the table, Mary and Bertha with them, and the formidable breakfast began. But in vain did the marquis offer dish after dish to his younger guest. Petit-Pierre refused all, and said if his host were willing he would like a cup of tea and two fresh eggs from the fowls he heard clucking so cheerfully in the poultry-yard.

"As for fresh eggs," said the marquis, "that's an easy matter. Mary shall get you some warm from the nest; but as for tea, the devil! I doubt if there is such a thing in the house."

Mary did not wait to be sent on this errand. She was already leaving the room when her father's remark about the tea stopped her, and she seemed as embarrassed as he. Evidently tea was lacking. Petit-Pierre noticed the quandary of his hosts.

"Oh!" he said, "don't give yourself any uneasiness. Monsieur de Bonneville will have the kindness to take a few spoonfuls from my dressing-case."

"Your dressing-case!"

"Yes," said Petit-Pierre. "As I have contracted the bad habit of drinking tea, I always carry it with me in travelling."

And he gave the Comte de Bonneville a little key, selecting it from a bunch that was hanging to a gold chain. The Comte de Bonneville hastened away by one door as Mary went out by the other.

"Upon my soul!" cried the marquis, engulfing an enormous mouthful of venison, "you are something of a girl, my young friend; and if it were not for the opinions I heard you express just now, which I consider too profound for the female mind, I should almost doubt your sex."

Petit-Pierre smiled.

"Wait till you see me at work, Monsieur le marquis, when we meet Philippe's troops. You'll soon resign the poor opinion you are forming of me now."

"What? Do you mean to belong to any of our bands?" cried the marquis, more and more puzzled.

"I hope so," said the youth.

"And I'll answer for it," said Bonneville, returning and giving Petit-Pierre the little key he had received from him, "I'll answer for it you'll always find him in the front rank."

"I am glad of it, my young friend," said the marquis; "but I am not surprised. God has not measured courage by the bodies to which he gives it, and I saw in the old war one of the ladies who followed M. de Charette fire her pistols valiantly."

Just then Mary returned, bringing in one hand a teapot, and in the other a plate with two boiled eggs on it.

"Thank you, my beautiful child," said Petit-Pierre, in a tone of gallant protection, which reminded M. de Souday of the seigneurs of the old court. "A thousand excuses for the trouble I have given you."

Louis XVIII.

"You spoke just now of his Majesty Louis XVIII.," said the Marquis de Souday, "and his culinary opinions. I have heard it said that he was extremely fastidious about his meals and his way of eating them."

"That is true," said Petit-Pierre; "he had a fashion of eating ortolans and cutlets which was his alone."

"And yet," said the Marquis de Souday, setting his handsome teeth into a cutlet and gnawing off the whole lean of it with one bite, "it seems to me there is only one way of eating a cutlet."

"Your way, I suppose, Monsieur le marquis," said Bonneville, laughing.

"Yes, faith! and as for ortolans, when by chance Mary and Bertha condescend to gunning, and bring home, not ortolans, but larks and fig-peckers, I take them by the beak, salt and pepper them nicely, put them whole into my mouth, and crunch them off at the neck. They are excellent eaten that way; only, it requires two or three dozen for each person."

Petit-Pierre laughed. It reminded him of the story of the Swiss guard who wagered he would eat a calf in six weeks for his dinner.

"I was wrong in saying that Louis XVIII. had a peculiar way of eating ortolans and cutlets; I should have said a peculiar way of having them cooked."

"Bless me!" exclaimed the marquis; "it seems to me there are no two ways for that either. You roast ortolans on a spit, and you broil cutlets on a gridiron."

"True," said Petit-Pierre, who evidently took pleasure in all these recollections; "but his Majesty Louis XVIII. refined upon the process. As for cutlets, the chef at the Tuileries was careful to cook the ones which 'had the honor,' as he said, to be eaten by the king between two other cutlets, so that the middle cutlet got the juices of the other two. He did something the same thing with the ortolans. Those that were eaten by the king were put inside a thrush, and the thrush inside a woodcock, so that by the time the ortolan was cooked the woodcock was uneatable, but the thrush was excellent, and the ortolan superlative."

"But really, young man," said the marquis, throwing himself back in his chair, and looking at Petit-Pierre with extreme astonishment, "one would think you had seen the good King Louis XVIII. performing all these gastronomic feats."

"I have seen him," replied Petit-Pierre.

"Did you have a place at court?" asked the marquis, laughing.

"I was page," replied Petit-Pierre.

"Ah! that explains it all," said the marquis. "Upon my soul! you have seen a good

deal for one of your age."

"Yes," replied Petit-Pierre, with a sigh. "Too much, in fact."

The two young girls glanced sympathetically at the young man. The face which looked so youthful at first sight showed, on closer examination, that a certain number of years had passed over it, and that troubles had left their mark there.

The marquis made two or three attempts to continue the conversation; but Petit-Pierre, buried in thought, seemed to have said all he meant to say, and whether he did not hear the various theories the marquis advanced on dark meats and white meats, and on the difference of flavor between the wild game of the forest and the domesticated game of the poultry-yard, or whether he did not think it worth while to approve or to confute, he maintained an absolute silence.

Nevertheless, in spite of this non-responsiveness, the marquis, now in high good-humor after the generous satisfaction of his appetite, was enchanted with his young friend. They returned to the salon; but there, Petit-Pierre, instead of remaining with the two young girls and the count and marquis near the fireplace,--where a fire which testified to an abundance of wood from the neighboring forest was blazing,--Petit-Pierre, thoughtful or dreamy as the reader chooses, went straight to the window and rested his forehead against the glass.

An instant later, as the marquis was making sundry compliments to the count on his young companion, the latter's name, pronounced in a curt, imperious tone, made him start with astonishment.

Petit-Pierre called to Bonneville, who turned hastily and ran rather than walked in the direction of the young peasant. The latter spoke for some moments and seemed to be giving orders. At each sentence uttered by the youth Bonneville bowed in token of assent, and as soon as Petit-Pierre had ended what he had to say the count took his hat, saluted every one present, and left the room.

Petit-Pierre then approached the marquis.

"Monsieur de Souday," he said, "I have just assured the Comte de Bonneville that you will not object to his taking one of your horses to make a trip to all the châteaus in the neighborhood and call a meeting here at Souday, this evening, of those very men whom you quarrelled with this morning. They are no doubt still assembled at Saint-Philbert. I have therefore enjoined him to make haste."

"But," said the marquis, "some of those gentlemen must be affronted with me for the manner in which I spoke to them this morning; they will probably refuse to come to my house."

"An order shall be given to those who resist an invitation."

"An order! from whom?" asked the marquis, in surprise.

"Why, from Madame la Duchesse de Berry, from whom M. de Bonneville has full powers. But," said Petit-Pierre, with a certain hesitation, "perhaps you fear that such a meeting at the château de Souday may have some fatal result for you or for your family. In that case, marquis, say so at once. The Comte de Bonneville has not yet started."

"God bless me!" cried the marquis, "let him go, and take my best horse, and founder him if he chooses!"

The words had scarcely left his lips before the Comte de Bonneville, as though he had heard them and meant to profit by the permission, rode at full speed past the windows and through the great gates to the main-road, which led to Saint-Philbert.

The marquis went to the window to follow the rider with his eyes, and did not leave it until he was lost to sight. Then he turned to speak to Petit-Pierre; but Petit-Pierre had disappeared, and when the marquis asked his daughters where he was they answered that the young man had gone to his room, remarking that he had letters to write.

"Queer little fellow!" muttered the marquis to himself.

XXIX.

THE VENDÉANS OF 1832.

The same day, about five in the afternoon the Comte de Bonneville returned. He had seen five of the principal leaders and they agreed to be at Souday that night between eight and nine o'clock.

The marquis, always hospitable, ordered his cook to tax the poultry-yard and the larder to the utmost, and to get ready the most plentiful supper she could possibly manage.

The five leaders who agreed to assemble that evening were Louis Renaud, Pascal, C[oe]ur-de-Lion, Gaspard, and Achille. Those of our readers who are somewhat familiar with the events of 1832 will easily recognize the personages who concealed their identity under these noms de guerre for the purpose of throwing the authorities off the scent in case of intercepted despatches.

By eight o'clock Jean Oullier, to the marquis's deep regret, had not returned. Consequently, the care of the entrance gates was intrusted to Mary, who was not to open them unless in reply to a knock given in a peculiar manner.

The salon, with shutters closed and curtains drawn, was the place selected for the conference. By seven o'clock four persons were ready and waiting in this room,--namely, the Marquis de Souday, the Comte de Bonneville, Petit-Pierre, and Bertha. Mary, as we have said, was stationed at the gates, in a sort of little lodge, which had an iron-barred window toward the road, through which it was possible to see whoever rapped, and so admit none until assured of the visitor's identity.

Of all those in the salon the most impatient was Petit-Pierre, whose dominant characteristic did not seem to be calmness. Though the clock said barely half-past seven, and the meeting was fixed for eight, he went restlessly to the door again and again to hear if any sounds along the road announced the expected gentlemen. At last, precisely at eight o'clock, a knock was heard at the gate, or rather three knocks

separated in a certain manner, which indicated the arrival of a leader.

"Ah!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre, going eagerly to the door.

But the Comte de Bonneville stopped him with a respectful smile and gesture.

"You are right," said the young man, and he went back and seated himself in the darkest corner of the salon. Almost at the same moment one of the expected leaders appeared in the doorway.

"M. Louis Renaud," said the Comte de Bonneville, loud enough for Petit-Pierre to hear him, and to recognize the man under the disguise of the assumed name.

The Marquis de Souday went forward to meet the new-comer, with all the more eagerness because this young man was one of the few at the conference of the morning who had favored an immediate call to arms.

"Ah, my dear count," said the marquis, "come in. You are the first to arrive, and that's a good omen."

"If I am the first, my dear marquis," replied Louis Renaud, "I assure you it is not that others are less eager; but my home being nearer to the château I have not so far to come, you know."

So saying, the personage who called himself Louis Renaud, and who was dressed in the ordinary simple clothes of a Breton peasant, advanced into the room with such perfect juvenile grace and bowed to Bertha with an ease so essentially aristocratic, that it was quite evident he would have found it difficult to assume, even momentarily, the manners and language of the social caste whose clothes he borrowed.

These social duties duly paid to the marquis and Bertha, the new-comer turned his attention to the Comte de Bonneville; but the latter, knowing the impatience of Petit-Pierre, who, though he remained in his corner, was making his presence known by movements the count alone could interpret, at once proceeded to open the

question.

"My dear count," he said to the so-called Louis Renaud, "you know the extent of my powers, you have read the letter of her Royal Highness Madame, and you know that, momentarily at least, I am her intermediary to you. What is your opinion on the situation?"

"My opinion, my dear count, I may not give precisely as I gave it this morning. Here, where I know I am among the ardent supporters of Madame, I shall risk telling the plain truth."

"Yes, the plain truth," said Bonneville; "that is what Madame desires to know. And whatever you tell me, my dear count, she will know exactly as if she heard it."

"Well, my opinion is that nothing ought to be done until the arrival of the maréchal."

"The maréchal!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre. "Is he not at Nantes?"

Louis Renaud, who had not before noticed the young man in his corner, turned his eyes to him on hearing this question. Then he bowed, and replied:--

"On reaching home this morning I heard for the first time that the maréchal had left Nantes as soon as he heard of the failure at Marseille, and no one knows either the road he has taken or the purpose that carried him away."

Petit-Pierre stamped his foot with impatience.

"But," he cried, "the maréchal is the soul of the enterprise. His absence will check the uprising and diminish the confidence of our men. Unless he commands, all the leaders will be of equal rank, and we shall see the same rivalries among them that were so fatal to the royalist party in the old wars of La Vendée."

Seeing that Petit-Pierre assumed the conversation, Bonneville stepped backward, giving place to the youth, who now advanced into the circle of light cast by the lamps and candles. Louis Renaud looked with amazement at a young man, apparently almost a child, who spoke with such assurance and decision.

"It is a delay, monsieur," he said; "that is all. You may be sure that as soon as the maréchal knows of the arrival of Madame in La Vendée, he will instantly return to his post."

"Did not M. de Bonneville tell you that Madame was on the way and would be speedily among her friends?"

"Yes, he did tell me so; and the news has given me the keenest satisfaction."

"Delay! delay!" murmured Petit-Pierre. "I have always heard it said that any uprising in your part of the country ought to take place during the first two weeks in May. After that the inhabitants are busy with their agriculture and are not so easily aroused. Here it is the 14th, and we are already late. As for the leaders, they are convoked, are they not?"

"Yes, monsieur," said Louis Renaud, with a certain sad gravity, "they are; and I ought to add that you can hardly count on any but the leaders." Then he added, with a sigh, "And not all of them either, as M. le Marquis de Souday discovered this morning."

"You surely do not mean to say that, monsieur!" cried Petit-Pierre. "Lukewarmness in La Vendée! and that too, when our friends in Marseille--and I can speak confidently, for I have just arrived from there--are so furious at their failure that they are longing to take revenge!"

A pale smile crossed the lips of the young leader.

"You are from the South, monsieur," he said, "though you have not the accent of it."

"You are right; I am," answered Petit-Pierre. "What of it?"

"You must not confound the South with the West, the Marseillais with the Vendéans. A proclamation may rouse the South, and a check rebuff it. Not so in La Vendée. When you have been here some time you will appreciate the truth of what I say. La Vendée is grave, cold, silent. All projects are discussed slowly, deliberately;

the chances of success and defeat are each considered. Then, if La Vendée sees a prospect of success she holds out her hand, says yes, and dies, if need be, to fulfil her promise. But as she knows that yes and no are words of life and death to her, she is slow in uttering them."

"You forget enthusiasm, monsieur," said Petit-Pierre.

"Ah, enthusiasm!" he replied; "I heard that talked of in my boyhood. It is a divinity of a past age which has stepped from its pedestal since the days when so many pledges were made to our fathers only to be forgotten. Do you know what passed this morning at Saint-Philbert?"

"In part, yes; the marquis told me."

"But after the marquis left?"

"No; I know nothing."

"Well, out of the twelve leaders present who were appointed to command the twelve divisions, seven protested in the name of their men, and they have by this time sent those men back to their homes, all the while declaring, every one of them, that personally and under all circumstances, they would shed their blood for Madame; only they would not, they added, take before God the terrible responsibility of dragging their peasantry into an enterprise which promised to be nothing more, so it seemed to them, than a bloody skirmish."

"Then it comes to this," said Petit-Pierre. "Must we renounce all hope, all effort?"

The same sad smile crossed the lips of the young leader.

"All hope, yes, perhaps; all effort, no. Madame has written that she is urged forward by the committee in Paris; Madame assures us that she has ramifications in the army. Let us therefore make the attempt! Possibly a riot in Paris, combined with a defection in the army, may prove her judgment to have been better than ours. If we make no attempt on her behalf, Madame will always be convinced that had it been

made it would have been successful; and no doubt ought to be left in Madame's mind."

"But if the attempt fails?" cried Petit-Pierre.

"Five or six hundred men will have been uselessly killed, that is all. It is well that from time to time a party, even if it fails, should give such examples, not only to its own country but to neighboring nations."

"You are not of those who have sent back their men, then?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"No, monsieur; but I am of those who have sworn to die for her Royal Highness. Besides," he added, "perhaps the affair has already begun, and there may be no choice but to follow the movement."

"How so?" asked Petit-Pierre, Bonneville, and the marquis, in one breath.

"Shots were fired to-day at the fair at Montaigu--"

"And firing is going on now at the fords of the Boulogne," said an unknown voice from the doorway, on the threshold of which a new personage now appeared.

XXX.

THE WARNING.

The person we now introduce, or rather the person who now introduced himself into the salon of the Marquis de Souday, was the commissary-general of the future Vendéan army, who had changed his name, well-known at the bar of Nantes, for that of Pascal.

He had gone several times into foreign lands to confer with Madame, and knew her personally. It was scarcely two months since he had last seen her, on which occasion after delivering to her Royal Highness the news from France, he had received her last instructions in return. It was he who had come into La Vendée to tell the adherents to hold themselves in readiness.

"Aha!" exclaimed the Marquis de Souday, with a motion of the lips which meant that he did not hold lawyers in cherished admiration, "M. le Commissaire-général Pascal."

"Who brings news, apparently," said Petit-Pierre, with the evident intention of drawing upon himself the attention of the new-comer. The latter, when he heard the voice, turned immediately to the young man, who made him an almost imperceptible sign with lips and eyes, which, however, sufficed to let him know what was expected of him.

"News? Yes," he said.

"Good or bad?" asked Louis Renaud.

"Mixed. But we'll begin with the good."

"Go on."

"Her Royal Highness has crossed the South successfully, and is now safe and sound in La Vendée."

"Are you sure of that?" asked the Marquis de Souday and Louis Renaud in one breath.

"As sure as that I see you all five here in good health," replied Pascal. "Now let us go to the other news."

"Have you heard anything from Montaigu?" asked Louis Renaud.

"They fought there yesterday," said Pascal; "that is, a few shots were fired by the National Guard and some peasants were killed and wounded."

"What occasioned it?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"A dispute at the fair, which became a riot."

"Who commands at Montaigu?" again asked Petit-Pierre.

"A mere captain usually," replied Pascal; "but yesterday, in consequence of the fair, the sub-prefect and the general commanding the military sub-division were both

there."

"Do you know the general's name?"

"Dermoncourt."

"And pray, who is General Dermoncourt?"

"Under what head do you desire to know of him, monsieur,--man, opinions, or character?"

"All three heads."

"As a man, he is from sixty to sixty-two years old, and he belongs to that iron race which fought the wars of the Revolution and the Empire. He will be night and day in the saddle, and not leave us an instant's rest."

"Very good," said Louis Renaud, laughing. "Then we'll try to tire him out; and as we are, none of us, half his age we shall be very unlucky or very stupid if we fail."

"His opinions?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"At heart I believe him to be a republican."

"In spite of twelve years' service under the Empire! He must have been dyed in the wool."

"There are many like him. You remember what Henri IV. said of the Leaguers,--'The barrel smells of the herring.'"

Dermoncourt.

"His character?"

"Oh, as for that, loyalty itself! He is neither an Amadis nor a Galahad. He's a Ferragus, and if ever Madame had the misfortune to fall into his hands--"

"What are you talking about, Monsieur Pascal?" exclaimed Petit-Pierre.

"I am a lawyer, monsieur," replied the civil commissary, "and in that capacity I foresee all the chances of a case. I repeat, therefore, that if Madame were

unfortunately to fall into the hands of General Dermoncourt she would have full opportunity to recognize his courtesy."

"Then," said Petit-Pierre, "that is the sort of enemy Madame would choose for herself,--brave, vigorous, and loyal. Monsieur, we are fortunate-- But you spoke of shots at the fords of the river?"

"I presume that those I heard on my way came from there."

"Perhaps," said the marquis, "Bertha had better go and reconnoitre. She will soon let us know what is happening."

Bertha rose.

"What!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre, "do you send mademoiselle?"

"Why not?" asked the marquis.

"I think it is a man's duty, not a woman's."

"My young friend," said the old gentleman, "in such matters I rely first upon myself, next upon Jean Oullier, and after Jean Oullier on Bertha and on Mary. I desire the honor of staying here with you; my fellow, Jean Oullier, is off amusing himself. Consequently, Bertha must go."

Bertha went toward the door; but on the threshold she met her sister and exchanged a few words with her in a low voice.

"Here is Mary," she said, turning back.

"Ah!" exclaimed the marquis; "did you hear the firing, my girl?"

"Yes, father," said Mary; "they are fighting."

"Where?"

"At the springs of Baugé."

"You are sure?"

"Yes; the shots came from the marsh."

"You see," said the marquis; "the news is precise. Who keeps the gate in your absence?"

"Rose Tinguy."

"Listen!" said Petit-Pierre.

Loud raps were heard upon the gate.

"The devil!" cried the marquis; "that's not one of us."

They all listened attentively.

"Open! open!" cried a voice. "There's not an instant to lose!"

"It is his voice!" exclaimed Mary, eagerly.

"His voice?--whose voice?" said the marquis.

"Yes, I recognize it," said Bertha,--"the voice of young Baron Michel."

"What does that cabbage-grower want here?" said the marquis, making a step toward the door as if to prevent his entrance.

"Let him come, let him come, marquis!" cried Bonneville. "I'll answer for him; there's nothing to fear."

He had hardly said the words before the sound of a rapid step was heard, and the young baron rushed into the salon, pale, breathless, covered with mud, dripping with perspiration, and with scarcely breath enough to say:--

"Not a moment to lose! Fly! Escape! They are coming!"

He dropped on one knee, resting one hand on the ground, for his breath failed him, his strength was exhausted. He had done, as he promised Jean Oullier, nearly a mile and a half in six minutes.

There was a moment of trouble and confusion in the salon.

"To arms!" cried the marquis. Springing to his own gun, he pointed to a rack at the corner of the room, where three or four carbines and fowling-pieces were hanging.

The Comte de Bonneville and Pascal, with one and the same movement, threw themselves before Petit-Pierre as if to defend him.

Mary sprang to the young baron to raise him and give him what help he needed, while Bertha ran to a window looking toward the forest and opened it.

Shots were then heard, evidently coming nearer, though still at some distance.

"They are on the Viette des Biques," said Bertha.

"Nonsense!" said the marquis; "impossible they should attempt such a dangerous path!"

"They are there, father," said Bertha.

"Yes, yes," gasped Michel. "I saw them there; they have torches. A woman is guiding them, marching at their head; the general is second."

"Oh, that cursèd Jean Oullier! Why isn't he here?" said the marquis.

"He is fighting, Monsieur le marquis," said Michel. "He sent me; he couldn't come himself."

"He!" exclaimed the marquis.

"But I was coming, mademoiselle; I was coming myself. I knew yesterday the château was to be attacked, but I was a prisoner; I got down from a second-story window."

"Good God!" cried Mary, turning pale.

"Bravo!" exclaimed Bertha.

"Gentlemen," said Petit-Pierre, tranquilly, "I think we must decide on a course. Shall we fight? If we do, we must arm ourselves at once, bar the gates, and take our posts. Shall we escape? If so, there is even less time to lose."

"Let us fight!" said the marquis.

"No, escape!" cried Bonneville. "When Petit-Pierre is safe we will fight."

"What is that you say, count?" exclaimed Petit-Pierre.

"I say that nothing is ready; we are not prepared to fight. Are we, gentlemen?"

"Oh, yes, we can always fight," said the youthful, light-hearted voice of a new-comer, addressing himself partly to those in the salon, and partly to two other young men who were following him, and whom, no doubt, he had met at the gate.

"Ah, Gaspard! Gaspard!" cried Bonneville.

Springing to meet the new arrival, he whispered something in his ear.

"Gentlemen," said Gaspard, turning to the others, "the Comte de Bonneville is perfectly right; we must retreat." Then addressing the marquis, he added, "Haven't you some secret door or issue to the castle, marquis? We have no time to lose; the last shots we heard at the gate--Achille, C[oe]ur-de-Lion, and I--were not half a mile distant."

"Gentlemen," said the Marquis de Souday, "you are in my house, and it is for me to assume the responsibility. Silence! listen to me and obey me to-night; I will obey you to-morrow."

All were silent.

"Mary," said the marquis, "close the gates, but do not barricade them; leave them so that they can be opened at the first rap. Bertha, to the underground passage instantly, and don't lose a moment. My daughters and I will receive the general and do the honors of the château to him. To-morrow, wherever you are, we will join you; only, let us know where that will be."

Mary sprang from the room to execute her father's order, while Bertha, signing to Petit-Pierre to follow her, went out by the opposite door, crossed the inner courtyard, entered the chapel, took two wax tapers from the altar, lighted them, gave one to Bonneville, one to Pascal, and then, pushing a spring which made the front of the altar turn of itself, she pointed to a stairway, leading to the vaults in which the lords

of Souday were formerly buried.

"You can't lose your way," she said; "you will find a door at the farther end, and the key is in it. That door leads into the open country. These gentlemen all know how to find their way there."

Petit-Pierre took Bertha's hand and pressed it warmly. Then he sprang down the steps to the vault behind Bonneville and Pascal, who lighted the way.

Louis Renaud, Achille, C[oe]ur-de-Lion, and Gaspard followed Petit-Pierre.

Bertha closed the aperture behind them. She noticed that Michel was not among the fugitives.

XXXI.

MY OLD CRONY LORIOT.

The Marquis de Souday, after watching the fugitives with his eyes until they entered the chapel, gave one of those deep exclamations which mean that the breast is relieved of a heavy weight; then he returned to the vestibule. But instead of proceeding from the vestibule to the salon, he went from the vestibule to the kitchen.

Contrary to all his habits and to the great astonishment of his cook, he walked to the fire, raised the covers of the saucepans anxiously, made sure that no ragout was sticking to the bottom of them, and put back the spits a trifle so that no unexpected flame should dishonor the roasts; having done this he returned to the vestibule, thence to the dining-room, where he inspected the bottles, doubled their number, looked to see if the table was properly set, and then, satisfied with the inspection, returned to the salon.

There he found his daughters, the castle gate being intrusted to Rosine, whose only duty was to open it on the first rap.

The girls were seated beside the fire when their father entered. Mary was anxious, Bertha dreamy. Both were thinking of Michel. Bertha was intoxicated with that

pungent joy which follows the revelation of love in the heart of the one we love; she fancied she read in the glances of the young baron the assurance that it was for her the poor lad, so timid, so hesitating, had conquered his weakness and braved real perils. She measured the greatness of the love she supposed him to feel by the revolution that love had evidently made in his nature. She built her castles in the air, and blamed herself bitterly for not having urged him to return to the château when she noticed that he did not follow those whom his devotion had saved. Then she smiled; for suddenly a thought crossed her mind: if he had remained behind he must be hidden in some corner of the château, and was it not for the pleasure of meeting her privately? Perhaps if she went into the shrubbery of the park he would start up beside her and say: "See what I have done to obtain a word with you!"

The marquis had scarcely seated himself in his accustomed easy-chair, and had not had time to notice the preoccupation of his daughters, which he would, of course, attribute to another cause than the true one, when a single rap was heard on the gate. The marquis started,--not because he did not expect the rap, but because this rap was not the one he expected. It was timid, almost obsequious, and, consequently, there was nothing military about it.

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed the marquis; "whom have we here, I'd like to know."

"Some one knocked," said Bertha, coming out of her revery.

"One rap," said Mary.

The marquis shook his head as if to say, "That's not the point," and then, deciding to see for himself what the matter was, he left the salon, crossed the vestibule, and advanced as far as the top step of the portico.

There, instead of the bayonets and sabres he was expecting to see glitter in the darkness, instead of the soldierly figures and moustaches with which he proposed to make acquaintance, the Marquis de Souday saw nothing but the enormous dome of a blue cotton umbrella, which approached him, point forward, up the steps of the

portico.

As this umbrella, steadily advancing like a turtle's carapace, threatened to put out his eye with its point, which stuck forth like the central spot of an ancient shield, the marquis raised the orb of this buckler and came face to face with a weasel's muzzle, surmounted by two little, glittering eyes, like carbuncles, and topped with a very tall hat, extremely narrow in the brim and so much brushed and rebrushed that it shone in the dusky light as though it were varnished.

"By all the devils of hell!" cried the marquis, "if it isn't my old crony Loriot!"

"Ready to offer you his little services if you think him worthy," replied a falsetto voice which its owner endeavored to make ingratiating.

"You are very welcome indeed to Souday, Maître Loriot," said the marquis, in a tone of good-humor and as if he expected some genuine pleasure from the presence of the person he welcomed so cordially. "I expect quite a numerous party this evening, and you shall help me do the honors. Come in, and see the young ladies."

Thereupon the old gentleman, with an easy air that showed how convinced he was of the distance between a Marquis de Souday and a village notary, preceded his guest into the salon. It is true that Maître Loriot took so much time to wipe his boots on the mat which lay at the door of that sanctuary that the politeness of the marquis, had he exercised it in remaining behind his visitor, would have been sorely tried and lessened.

Let us profit by the moment when the legal functionary shuts his umbrella and dries his feet to sketch his portrait, if indeed the undertaking is not beyond our powers.

Maître Loriot, the notary of Machecoul, was a little old fellow, thin and slim and seeming smaller than he really was from his habit of never speaking except half double in an attitude of the profoundest respect. A long, sharp nose was the whole of his face; nature, in developing beyond all reason that feature of his countenance, had economized on the rest with such extraordinary parsimony that it was necessary to

look at him for some time before perceiving that Maître Loriot had a mouth and chin and eyes like other men; but when that knowledge was once attained it was observable that the eyes were vivacious and the mouth not by any means devoid of shrewdness.

Maître Loriot fulfilled the promises of his physiognomical prospectus; and he was clever enough to wring some thirty thousand francs out of a country practice in which his predecessors had hardly managed to make both ends meet. To attain this result, supposed until he came to be impossible, M. Loriot had studied, not the Code, but men; he had learned from that study that vanity and pride were the dominant instincts of mankind; and he had, in consequence, endeavored to make himself agreeable to those two vices, in which effort he succeeded so well that he soon became absolutely necessary to those who possessed them.

By reason of this system of behavior, politeness in Maître Loriot had become servility; he did not bow, he prostrated himself; and, like the fakirs of India, he had so trained his body to certain submissive motions that this attitude was now habitual with him. Never would he have addressed a titled person, were that person only a baron or even a chevalier, in any other than the third person. He showed a gratitude both humble and overflowing for all affability bestowed upon him; and as, at the same time, he manifested an exaggerated devotion to the interests confided to him, he had finally, little by little, obtained a very considerable clientèle among the nobility of the neighborhood.

But the thing above all others which contributed to the success of Maître Loriot in the department of the Loire-Inférieure and even in the adjoining departments, was the ardor of his political opinions. He was one of those who might well be called "more royalist than the king himself." His little gray eye flamed when he heard the name of a Jacobin, and to his mind all who had ever belonged to the liberal side, from M. de Chateaubriand to M. de la Fayette were Jacobins. Never would he have

recognized the monarchy of July, and he always called the King Louis-Philippe "Monsieur le Duc d'Orléans," not even allowing him the title of Royal Highness which Charles X. did grant him.

Maître Loriot was a frequent visitor to the Marquis de Souday. It was part of his policy to parade an extreme respect for this illustrious relic of the former social order,--a social order he deeply regretted; and his respect had gone so far that he had made various loans to the marquis, who, being very careless, as we have said, in the matter of money, neglected as a matter of course to pay the interest on them.

The Marquis de Souday always welcomed Maître Loriot, partly on account of the said loans; also because the old gentleman's fibre was not less sensitive than that of others to agreeable flattery; and, lastly, because the coolness which existed between the owner of Souday and the other proprietors of the neighborhood made him rather lonely, and he was glad of any distraction to the monotony of his life.

When the little notary thought his boots were cleaned of every vestige of mud he entered the salon. There he again bowed to the marquis, who had returned to his usual easy chair, and then he began to compliment the two young girls. But the marquis did not leave him time to do much of that.

"Loriot," he said, "I am always glad to see you."

The notary bowed to the ground.

"Only," continued the marquis, "you will permit me to ask, won't you? what brings you here into our desert at half-past nine o'clock of a rainy night. I know that when a man has such an umbrella as yours the sky above him is always blue, but--"

The notary judged it proper not to allow such a joke to be made by a marquis without laughing, and murmuring "Ah, good! very good!" Then, making a direct answer, he said:--

"I was at the château de la Logerie very late, having been there to carry some money to Madame la baronne on an order I did not receive till two in the afternoon. I was

coming back on foot, as I usually do, when I heard noises of evil portent in the forest, which confirmed what I already knew of a riot at Montaigu. I feared, if I went any farther, that I might meet the soldiers of the Duc d'Orléans; and to avoid that unpleasantness I thought that M. le marquis would deign to let me lodge here for the night."

At the mention of la Logerie Mary and Bertha raised their heads like two horses who hear from afar and suddenly the sound of the bugle.

"Oh! you have come from la Logerie, have you?" said the marquis.

"Yes, as I have just had the honor of mentioning to Monsieur le marquis," replied Maître Loriot.

"Well! well! well! We have had another visitor from la Logerie this evening."

"The young baron, perhaps?" suggested the notary.

"Yes."

"I am looking for him."

"Loriot," said the marquis, "I am astonished to hear you--a man whose principles I have always considered sound--to hear you prostituting a title which you habitually respect by attaching it to the name of those Michels."

As the marquis uttered this remark with an air of superb disdain Bertha turned crimson and Mary turned pale. The impression produced by his words was lost upon the old gentleman, but it did not escape the little gray eye of the notary. He was about to speak when Monsieur de Souday made a sign with his hand that he had not finished his remarks.

"And I wish to know why you, my old crony," he continued, "whom we have always treated well and kindly, why you think it necessary to put forward a subterfuge in order to enter my house."

"Monsieur le marquis!" stammered Loriot.

"You came here to look for young Michel, didn't you? That's all very well, but why lie about it?"

"I beg Monsieur le marquis to accept my most humble excuses. The mother of the young man, whom I have been obliged to accept as a client, being a legacy with the practice of my predecessor, is very anxious. Her son got out of a window on the second story at the risk of breaking his neck, and in defiance of her maternal wishes he has run away; consequently Madame Michel requests me--"

"Ha! ha!" cried the marquis, "did he really do that?"

"Literally, Monsieur le marquis."

"Well, that reconciles me to him,--not perhaps altogether, but somewhat."

"If Monsieur le marquis would indicate to me where I am likely to find the young man," said Loriot, "I could take him back to his mother."

"As for that, the devil knows where he has taken himself, I don't! Do you know, girls?" asked the marquis, turning to his daughters.

Bertha and Mary both made signs in the negative.

"You see, my dear crony, that we can't be of the least use to you," said the marquis. "But do tell me why mother Michel locked up her son."

"It seems," replied the notary, "that young Michel, hitherto so gentle, and docile, and obedient, has fallen suddenly in love."

"Ah, ha! taken the bit in his teeth? I know what that is! Well, Maître Loriot, if you are called in counsel, do you tell mother Michel to give him his head and keep a light rein on him; that's better than a martingale. He strikes me as a pretty good little devil, what I have seen of him."

"An excellent heart, Monsieur le marquis; and then, an only son!--more than a hundred thousand francs a year!" said the notary.

"Hum!" exclaimed the marquis, "if that's all he has, it is little enough to cover the

villanies of the name he bears."

"Father!" said Bertha, while Mary only sighed, "You forget the service he did us to-night."

"Hey! hey!" thought Loriot, looking at Bertha, "can the baroness be right after all? It would be a fine contract to draw."

And he began to add up the fees he might expect from a marriage contract between Baron Michel de la Logerie and the daughter of the Marquis de Souday.

"You are right, my child," said the marquis; "we'll leave Loriot to hunt up mother Michel's lost lamb, and say no more about them." Then, turning to Loriot, he added: "Are you going any further on your quest, Mr. Notary?"

"If Monsieur le marquis will deign to permit, I would prefer--"

"Just now, you gave me, as a pretext for staying here, your dread of encountering the soldiers," interrupted the marquis. "Are you really afraid of them? Heavens and earth, what's the meaning of that? You, one of us, afraid of soldiers!"

"I am not afraid," replied Loriot; "Monsieur le marquis may believe me. But those cursed Blues turn my stomach; I feel such an aversion for them that after I have seen even one of their uniforms I can't eat anything for twenty-four hours."

"That explains your leanness; but the saddest part of it is that this aversion of yours obliges me to turn you out of my house."

"Monsieur le marquis is making fun of his humble servant."

"Indeed I am not; I don't wish your death, that's all."

"My death?"

"Yes, if the sight of one soldier gives you twenty-four hours of inanition, you'll certainly die of starvation outright if you pass a whole night under the same roof as a regiment."

"A regiment?"

"Yes, a regiment. I have invited a regiment to sup at Souday to-night; and the regard I have for you obliges me to send you off, hot foot, at once. Only, be careful which way you go because those scamps the soldiers if they catch you in the fields, or rather in the woods, at this time of night may take you for what you are not--I mean to say, for what you are."

"What then?"

"What then! why, they'd honor you with a shot or two, and the muskets of M. le Duc d'Orléans are loaded with ball, you know."

The notary turned pale and stammered a few unintelligible words.

"Decide; you have the choice,--death by hunger, or by guns. You've no time to lose; I hear the tramp of men--and there! precisely!--that's the general knocking at the gate."

Sure enough, the knocker resounded; this time it was vigorously handled, as became the guest whose arrival it announced.

"In company with Monsieur le marquis," said Loriot, "I will conquer my aversion, invincible as it is."

"Good! then take that torch and go with me to meet my guests."

"Your guests? Why, really, Monsieur le marquis, I can't believe--"

"Come, come, Thomas Loriot, you shall see first, and believe afterwards."

And the Marquis de Souday, taking a torch himself, advanced to the portico. Bertha and Mary followed him; Mary thoughtful, Bertha anxious,--both looking earnestly into the shadows of the courtyard to see if they could discover any sign of the presence of him they were both thinking of.

XXXII.

THE GENERAL EATS A SUPPER WHICH HAD NOT BEEN PREPARED FOR

HIM.

According to the instructions of the marquis transmitted by Mary to Rosine, the gate was opened to the soldiers at the first rap. No sooner was this done than they filed into the courtyard and hastened to surround the house.

Just as the old general was about to dismount he saw the two torchbearers on the portico, and beside them, partly in shadow, partly in the light, the two young girls. They all came toward him with a gracious, hospitable manner which greatly amazed him.

"Faith! general," said the marquis, coming down the last step, as if to go as far as possible to meet the general. "I began to despair of seeing you, this evening at least."

"You despaired of seeing me, Monsieur le marquis!" exclaimed the general, astonished at this exordium.

"Yes, I despaired of seeing you. At what hour did you leave Montaigu,--at seven?"

"At seven precisely?"

"Well, that's just it! I calculated that it would take you about two hours to march here, and I expected you at nine or half-past, and here it is half-past ten. I was just wondering if some accident could have happened to deprive me of the honor of receiving so brave and gallant a soldier."

"Then you expected me, monsieur?"

"Why, of course, I did. I'll bet it was that cursed ford at Pont-Farcy which detained you. What an abominable country it is, general!--brooks that become impassible torrents from the slightest rain; roads--call them roads indeed! I call them bogs! How did you get over those dreadful springs of Baugé?--a sea of mud in which you are sure to flounder to the waist, and are lucky enough if it doesn't come over your head. But even that is nothing to the Viette des Biques. When I was a young fellow and a frantic hunter I used to think twice before risking myself over it. Really,

general, I feel very grateful for this visit when I think what trouble and fatigue it has caused you."

The general saw that, for the moment, he had to do with as shrewd a player as himself; and he resolved to eat with a good grace the dish that the marquis served to him.

"I beg you to believe, Monsieur le marquis," he replied, "that I regret having kept you waiting, and that the fault of the delay is none of mine. In any case, I will try to profit by the lesson you give me, and the next time I come I will set out in time to defy fords, bogs, and precipices from hindering my arrival politely in season."

At this moment an officer came up to the general to take his orders about the search to be made of the château.

"It is useless, my dear captain," replied the general; "the marquis tells me we have come too late; in other words, we have nothing to do here,--the château is all in order."

"But, my dear general!" said the marquis, "in order or not, my house is at your disposal; pray do exactly as you like with it."

"You offer it with such good grace I cannot refuse."

"Well, young ladies, what are you about," exclaimed the marquis, "that you let me keep these gentlemen talking here in the rain? Pray come in, general, come in, gentlemen; there's an excellent fire in the salon which will dry your clothes--which that cursed ford must have soaked thoroughly."

"How shall I thank you for all your considerateness?" said the general, biting his moustache and secretly his lips.

"Oh! you are a man I am glad to serve, general," replied the marquis, preceding the officers whom he was lighting, the little notary modestly bringing up the rear with the other torch. "But permit me," he added, "to present to you my daughters.

Mesdemoiselles Bertha and Mary de Souday."

"Faith, marquis," said the general, gallantly, "the sight of two such charming faces is worth the risks of taking cold at the fords, or getting muddy in the bog, or even breaking one's neck on the Viette des Biques."

"Well, young ladies," said the marquis, "make use of your pretty eyes to see if supper, which has long been waiting for these gentlemen, intends to keep us waiting now."

"Really, marquis," said Dermoncourt, turning to his officers, "we are quite confounded by such kindness; and our gratitude--"

"Is amply relieved by the pleasure your visit affords us. You can easily believe, general, that having grown accustomed to the two pretty faces you compliment so charmingly, and being moreover their father, I should sometimes find life in my little castle a trifle insipid and monotonous. You can understand, therefore, that when an imp of my acquaintance came and whispered in my ear, 'General Dermoncourt started from Montaigu at seven o'clock, with his staff, to pay you a visit,' I was delighted."

"Ah! it was an imp who told you?"

"Yes; there is always such a being in every cottage and every castle in this region of country. So the prospect of the pleasant evening I should owe to your coming, general, gave me something of my old elasticity, which, alas! I am losing. I hurried my people and put my hen-house and larder under contribution, set my daughters in motion, and kept my old crony Loriot, the Machecoul notary, to do you honor; and I have even, God damn me! put my own hand in the pie, and we have managed, among us, to prepare a supper which is ready for you, and also for your soldiers--for I don't forget I was once a soldier myself."

"Ah! you have served in the army, Monsieur le marquis?" said Dermoncourt.

"Perhaps in the same wars as yourself; though, instead of saying that I served, I

ought only say that I fought."

"In this region?"

"Yes, under the orders of Charette."

"Ah ha!"

"I was his aide-de-camp."

"Then this is not the first time we have met, marquis."

"Is that really so?"

"Yes, I made the campaigns of 1795 and 1796 in La Vendée."

"Ah! bravo! that delights me," cried the marquis; "then we can talk at dessert of our youthful prowess--Ah, general," said the old gentleman, with a certain melancholy, "it is getting to be a rare thing on either side to find those who can talk of the old campaigns. But here come the young ladies to tell us that supper is ready. General, will you give your arm to one of them? the captain will take the other." Then, addressing the rest of the officers, he said, "Gentlemen, will you follow the general into the dining-room?"

They sat down to table,--the general between Mary and Bertha, the marquis between two officers. Maître Loriot took the seat next to Bertha, intending, in the course of the meal, to get in a word about Michel. He had made up his mind that, so far as he was concerned, the marriage contract should be drawn in his office.

For some minutes nothing was heard but the clatter of plates and glasses; all present were silent. The officers, following the example of their general, accepted complacently this unexpected termination of their intended attack. The marquis, who usually dined at five o'clock, and was therefore nearly six hours late in getting anything to eat, was making up to his stomach for its lost time. Mary and Bertha, both of them pensive, were not sorry to have an excuse for their silent reflections in the aversion they felt to the tricolor cockade.

The general was evidently reflecting on some means of getting even with the marquis. He understood perfectly well that Monsieur de Souday had received warning of his approach. Practised in Vendéan warfare, he well knew the facility and rapidity with which news is communicated from one village to another. Surprised at first by the heartiness of the Marquis de Souday's welcome, he had gradually recovered his coolness and returned to his habits of minute observation. All he saw, whether it was his host's extreme attentions, or the profusion of the repast, far too sumptuous to have been prepared for enemies, only confirmed his suspicions; but, patient as all good hunters of men and game should be, and certain that if his illustrious prey had taken flight (as he believed she had) it would be useless to pursue her in the darkness, he resolved to postpone his more serious investigations and to let no indication of what was below the surface escape him.

It was the general who first broke silence.

"Monsieur le marquis," he said, raising his glass, "the choice of a toast may be as difficult for you as for us; but there is one that cannot be embarrassing, and has, indeed, the right to precede all others. Permit me to drink to the health of the Demoiselles de Souday, thanking them for their share in the courteous reception with which you have honored us."

"My sister and I thank you, monsieur," said Bertha; "and we are very glad to have pleased you in accordance with our father's wishes."

"Which means," said the general, smiling, "that you are only gracious to us under orders, and that our gratitude for your attentions is really due to Monsieur le marquis. Well, that's all right; I like such military frankness, which would induce me to leave the camp of your admirers and enter that of your friends, if I thought I could be received there wearing, as I do, the tricolor cockade."

"The praises you give to my frankness, monsieur," replied Bertha, "induce me to say honestly that the colors you wear are not those I like to see upon my friends; but, if

you really wish for that title I will grant it, hoping that the day may come when you will wear mine."

"General," said the marquis, scratching his ear, "your remark is perfectly true; what toast can I give in return for your graceful compliment to my daughters without compromising either of us? Have you a wife?"

The general was determined to nonplus the marquis.

"No," he said.

"A sister?"

"No."

"A mother, perhaps?"

"Yes," said the general, issuing from the ambush in which he seemed to have been awaiting the marquis, "France, our common mother."

"Ah, bravo! then I drink to France! and may the glory and the grandeur that her kings have given her for the last eight centuries long continue."

"And, permit me to add, the half-century of liberty which she owes to her sons."

"That is not only an addition, but a modification," said the marquis. Then, after an instant's silence, he added, "Faith! I'll accept that toast! White or tricolor, France is always France!"

All the guests touched glasses, and Loriot himself, carried off his balance by the enthusiasm of the marquis, emptied his glass.

Once launched in this direction, and moistened abundantly, the conversation became so lively and even vagabond that after the supper was two thirds through, Mary and Bertha, thinking they had better not wait till the end of it, rose from table and passed without remark into the salon.

Maître Loriot, who seemed to have come there as much for the daughters as for their father, rose a few moments later and followed them.

XXXIII.

IN WHICH MAÎTRE LORIOT'S CURIOSITY IS NOT EXACTLY SATISFIED.

Maître Loriot profited, as we have said, by the example of the young ladies, and left the marquis and his guests to evoke at ease their memories of the "war of giants." He rose from table and followed the Demoiselles de Souday into the salon. There he advanced toward them, bending almost double, and rubbing his hands.

"Ah!" said Bertha; "you seem to be pleased about something, Monsieur le notaire."

"Mesdemoiselles," replied Maître Loriot, in a low voice, "I have done my best to second your father's trick. I hope that if need be you will not refuse to certify to the coolness and self-possession I have shown under the circumstances."

"What trick do you mean, dear Monsieur Loriot," said Mary, laughing. "Neither Bertha nor I know what you mean."

"Good heavens!" said the notary; "I don't know any more than you know, but it seems to me that Monsieur le marquis must have some serious and powerful reasons to treat as old friends, and even better than some old friends are treated, those hateful bullies whom he has admitted to his table. The attentions he is paying to those hirelings of the usurper strike me as very strange, and I fancy they have a purpose."

"What purpose?" asked Bertha.

"Well, that of filling those fellows' minds with such a sense of security that they will neglect to look after their own safety, and then--taking advantage of their carelessness, to make them share the fate--"

"The fate?"

"The fate of--" repeated the notary.

"The fate of whom?"

The notary passed his hand across his throat.

"Holofernes, perhaps?" cried Bertha, laughing.

"Exactly," said Maître Loriot.

Mary joined her sister in the peals of laughter this assurance called forth. The little notary's supposition delighted the sisters beyond measure.

"So you assign us the part of Judith!" cried Bertha, endeavoring to check her laughter.

"But, mesdemoiselles--"

"If my father were here, Monsieur Loriot, he might be angry that you suppose him capable of such proceedings, which would be in my opinion, a little too Biblical. But don't be uneasy; we will tell neither papa nor the general, who certainly would not be flattered at the meaning you put upon our attentions."

"Young ladies," entreated Loriot, "forgive me if my political fervor, my horror for all the partisans of the present unfortunate doctrines, carried me rather too far."

"I forgive you, Monsieur Loriot," replied Bertha, who, having been, in consequence of her frank, decided nature, the most suspicious, felt that she had the most to pardon,--"I forgive you; and in order that you may not make such mistakes in future I shall give you the key-note of the situation. You must know that General Dermoncourt, whom you regard as Antichrist, has merely come to Souday to make exactly the same search that is made in all the neighboring châteaus."

"If that's the case," said the little notary, who was getting himself deeper and deeper into trouble, "why treat him with,--yes, I will say the word,--with such luxury and splendor? The law is precise."

"The law! How so?"

"Yes; it forbids all magistrates and civil and military officers charged with the execution of judicial authority to seize, carry away, or appropriate any articles other than those named in the warrant. What are these men now doing with the viands and

wines of all sorts which are on the table of the Marquis de Souday? They are ap-pro-pri-ating them!"

"It seems to me, my dear Monsieur Loriot," said Mary, "that my father has the right to invite whom he chooses to his table."

"Even those who come to execute--to bring into his home--an odious and tyrannical power? Certainly he has the right, mademoiselle; but you will allow me to regard it as a most unnatural thing, and to suppose it has some secret cause or object."

"In other words, Monsieur Loriot, you see a secret which you want to penetrate."

"Oh, mademoiselle--"

"Well, I'll confide it to you, as well as I can, my dear Monsieur Loriot. I am willing to trust you, if you, on your side, will tell me how it happened that having to look for Monsieur Michel de la Logerie, you came straight to the château de Souday."

Bertha said the words in a firm, incisive way, and the notary, to whom they were addressed, heard them with more embarrassment than was felt by the lady who uttered them.

As for Mary, she came up to her sister, slipped her arm within Bertha's, and resting her head upon the latter's shoulder, awaited, with a curiosity she did not seek to disguise, the answer of Maître Loriot.

"Well, if you really wish to know why, young ladies--"

The notary made a pause, as though expecting to be encouraged; and Bertha did encourage him with a nod.

"I came," continued Maître Loriot, "because Madame la Baronne de la Logerie informed me that the château de Souday was probably the place to which her son went on taking flight from his home."

"And on what did Madame la Baronne de la Logerie base that supposition?" asked Bertha, with the same questioning look and the same firm, incisive voice.

"Mademoiselle," replied the notary, more and more embarrassed, "after what I said to your father, really I do not know whether, in spite of the reward you promise to my frankness, I have the courage to say more."

"Why not?" said Bertha, with the same coolness. "Shall I help you? It is because she thinks, I believe you said, that the object of Monsieur Michel's love is at Souday."

"Yes, mademoiselle, that is just it."

"Very good; but what I desire to know, and what I shall insist on knowing, is Madame de la Logerie's opinion of that love."

"Her opinion is not exactly favorable, mademoiselle," returned the notary; "that I must admit."

"That's a point on which my father and the baroness will agree," said Bertha, laughing.

"But," continued the notary, pointedly, "Monsieur Michel will be of age in a few months,--consequently, free as to his actions, and the master of an immense fortune."

"As to his actions," said Bertha, "so much the better for him."

"In what way, mademoiselle?" asked the notary, maliciously.

"Why to rehabilitate the name he bears and efface the evil memories his father left behind him. As to the fortune, if I were the woman Monsieur Michel honored with his affection, I should advise him to make such use of it that there would soon be no name in the whole province more honored than his."

"What use would you advise him to make of it?" exclaimed the notary, much astonished.

"To return that money to those from whom they say his father got it, and to make restitution to the former proprietors of the national domain which M. Michel bought."

"But in that case, mademoiselle, you would ruin the man who had the honor to be in love with you," said the little notary, quite bewildered.

"What would that matter if he obtained the respect of all, and the regard of her who advised the sacrifice?"

Just then Rosine appeared at the door of the salon.

"Mademoiselle," she said, not addressing herself particularly to either Mary or Bertha, "will you please come here?"

Bertha wanted to continue her conversation with the notary. She was eager for information as to the feelings Madame de la Logerie had against her; and, moreover, she enjoyed talking, however vaguely, of projects which for some time past had been the theme of her meditations. So she told Mary to go and see what was wanted.

But Mary, on her side, was rather unwilling to leave the salon. She was frightened to see to what lengths Bertha's love had developed within the last few days; every word her sister said echoed painfully in her soul. She felt sure that Michel's love was wholly her own, and she thought with actual terror of Bertha's despair when she should discover how strangely she had deceived herself. Besides, in spite of Mary's immense affection for her sister, love had already poured into her heart the little dose of selfishness which always accompanies that emotion, and she was quite joyful, from another point of view, at what she was now hearing. The part which Bertha was tracing out for the wife of Michel she felt should be her own. So it happened that Bertha was obliged to ask her for the second time to see what Rosine wanted.

"Go, dearest," she said, kissing Mary's forehead, "go; and while you are there please give orders about preparing Monsieur Loriot's room; for I fear, in all this turmoil, it has been forgotten."

Mary was accustomed to obey, and she obeyed. Of the two sisters, she was by far the most docile and gentle. She found Rosine at the door.

"What do you want of us?" she asked.

Rosine did not reply. Then, as if she feared to be overheard from the dining-room, where the marquis was narrating the last day of Charette's life, she took Mary by the arm and drew her under the staircase at the farther end of the vestibule.

"Mademoiselle," she said, "he is hungry."

"He is hungry?" repeated Mary.

"Yes; he has just told me so."

"Who is it you are talking of? Who is hungry?"

"He, the poor lad."

"Who is he?"

"Why, Monsieur Michel."

"Monsieur Michel here!"

"Didn't you know it?"

"No."

"Two hours ago--after Mademoiselle Bertha returned from the chapel, just before the soldiers arrived--he came to the kitchen."

"Didn't he go away with Petit-Pierre?"

"No."

"And you say he went to the kitchen?"

"Yes; and he was so tired, it was quite pitiful. 'Monsieur Michel,' I said like that, 'why don't you go into the salon?' 'My dear Rosine,' said he, in his gentle way, 'they didn't ask me.' Then he wanted to go and sleep at Machecoul, for he said he wouldn't go back to La Logerie for all the world. It seems his mother meant to take him to Paris. So I wouldn't let him leave the house."

"You did quite right, Rosine. Where is he now?"

"I put him in the tower chamber; but as the soldiers have taken the ground-floor, we can't get in there now except through the passage at the end of the hay-loft, and I came to ask you for the key."

Mary's first thought (it was her good thought) was to tell her sister; but a second thought succeeded the first, and that, it must be owned, was less generous. It was no other than to see Michel first and alone. Rosine gave her the opportunity.

"I'll tell you where the key is," said Mary.

"Oh, mademoiselle," replied Rosine, "do come with me. There are so many men about that I don't like to be alone, and I should die of fright to go up there by myself; whereas if you, the marquis's daughter, were with me they would all respect us."

"But the provisions?"

"Here they are."

"Where?"

"In this basket."

"Oh, very good; then come."

And Mary sprang up the stairs with the agility of the kids she sometimes hunted among the rocks in the forest of Machecoul.

XXXIV.

THE TOWER CHAMBER.

When Mary reached the second floor she stopped before the room occupied by Jean Oullier. The key she wanted was kept in that room.

Then she opened a door which gave entrance from this floor on a winding stairway which led to the upper portion of the tower, where, preceding Rosine whose basket hindered her, she continued her ascension, which was somewhat dangerous, for the stairs of the half-abandoned tower had fallen into a state of dilapidation and decay. It

was at the top of this tower, in a little chamber under the roof, that Rosine and the cook, forming themselves into a committee of deliberation, had shut up the young Baron Michel de la Logerie.

The intention of these honest girls was excellent; the result was in no sense equal to their good-will. It would be impossible to imagine a more miserable refuge, or one where it would be less possible to obtain even a slight repose. The room was, in fact, used by Jean Oullier to store the seeds, tools, and other necessary articles for his various avocations as Jack-at-all-trades. The walls were literally palisaded with branches of beans, cabbages, lettuce, onions, of diverse varieties, all gone to seed and exposed to the air for the purpose of ripening and drying them. Unfortunately, these botanic specimens had acquired such a coating of dust, while awaiting the period of their return to earth, that the least movement made in the narrow chamber sent up a cloud of leguminous atoms which affected the atmosphere disagreeably.

The sole furniture of this room was a wooden bench, which was not a very comfortable seat, certainly; and Michel, unable to endure it, had betaken himself to a pile of oats of a rare species, which obtained, on account of their rarity, a place in this collection of precious germs. He seated himself in the midst of the mound, and there, in spite of some inconveniencies, he found enough elasticity to rest his limbs, which were cramped with fatigue.

But after a time Michel grew weary of lying on this movable and prickly sofa. When Guérin threw him down into the brook a goodly quantity of mud became attached to his garments, and the dampness soon penetrated to his skin. His stay before the kitchen fire had been short, so short that the dampness now returned, more penetrating than ever. He began, therefore, to walk up and down in the turret-room, cursing the foolish timidity to which he owed not only the cold, stiffness, and hunger he began to feel, but also--more dismal still--the loss of Mary's presence. He scolded himself for not securing his own profit out of the valiant enterprise he had

undertaken, and for losing courage to end successfully an affair he had so well begun.

Let us hasten to say here, in order that we may not misrepresent our hero's character, that the consciousness of his mistake did not make him a whit more courageous, and it never for an instant occurred to him to go frankly to the marquis and ask for hospitality,--a desire for which had been one of the determining motives of his flight.

Meantime the soldiers had arrived, and Michel, attracted by the noise to the narrow casement of his turret-chamber, saw the Demoiselles de Souday, their father, the general, and his officers, passing and repassing before the brilliantly lighted windows of the main building. It was then that, seeing Rosine in the courtyard beneath, he asked, with all the modesty of his character, for a bit of bread, and declared himself hungry.

Hearing, soon after, a light step apparently approaching his room, he began to feel a lively satisfaction under two heads: first, he was likely to get something to eat; and next, he should probably hear news of Mary.

"Is that you, Rosine?" he asked, when he heard a hand endeavoring to open the door.

"No, it is not Rosine; it is I, Monsieur Michel," said a voice.

Michel recognized it as Mary's voice; but he could not believe his ears. The voice continued:--

"Yes, I,--I, who am very angry with you!"

As the tone of the voice was not in keeping with the words, Michel was less alarmed than he might have been.

"Mademoiselle Mary!" he cried; "Mademoiselle Mary! Good heavens!"

He leaned against the wall to keep himself from falling. Meanwhile the young girl had opened the door.

"You!" cried Michel,--"you, Mademoiselle Mary! Oh, how happy I am!"

"Not so happy as you say."

"Why not?"

"Because, as you must admit, in the midst of your happiness you are dying of hunger."

"Ah, mademoiselle! who told you that?" stammered Michel, coloring to the whites of his eyes.

"Rosine. Come, Rosine, quick!" continued Mary. "Here, put your lantern on this bench, and open the basket at once; don't you see that Monsieur Michel is devouring it with his eyes?"

These laughing words made the young baron rather ashamed of the vulgar need of food he had expressed to his foster-sister. It came into his head that to seize the basket, fling it out of the window, at the risk of braining a soldier, fall upon his knees, and say to the young girl pathetically, with both hands pressed to his heart, "Can I think of my stomach when my heart is satisfied?" would be a rather gallant declaration to make. But Michel might have had such ideas in his head for a number of consecutive years without ever bringing himself to act in so cavalier a manner. He therefore allowed Mary to treat him exactly like a foster-brother. At her invitation he went back to his seat on the oats, and found it a very enjoyable thing to eat the food cut for him by the delicate hand of the young girl.

"Oh, what a child you are!" said Mary. "Why, after doing so gallant an act and rendering us a service of such importance, at the risk, too, of breaking your neck,--why didn't you come to my father, and say to him, as it was so natural to do, 'Monsieur, I cannot go home to my mother to-night; will you keep me till to-morrow morning?'"

"Oh, I never should have dared!" cried Michel, letting his arms drop on each side of him, like a man to whom an impossible proposal was made.

"Why not?" asked Mary.

"Because your father awes me."

"My father! Why, he is the kindest man in the world. Besides, are you not our friend?"

"Oh, how good of you, mademoiselle, to give me that title." Then, venturing to go a step farther, he added. "Have I really won it?"

Mary colored slightly. A few days earlier she would not have hesitated to reply that Michel was indeed her friend, and that she was constantly thinking of him. But during those few days Love had strangely modified her feelings and produced an instinctive reticence which she was far from comprehending. The more she was revealed to herself as a woman, by sensations hitherto unknown to her, the more she perceived that the manners, habits, and language resulting from the education she had received were unusual; and with that faculty of intuition peculiar to women she saw what she lacked on the score of reserve, and she resolved to acquire it for the sake of the emotion that filled her soul and made her feel the necessity of dignity.

Consequently, Mary, who up to this time had never concealed a single thought, began to see that a young girl must sometimes, if not lie, at least evade the truth; and she now put in practice this new discovery in her answer to Michel's question.

"I think," she replied, "that you have done quite enough to earn the name of friend." Then without giving him time to return to a subject on hazardous ground, she continued, "Come, give me proof of the appetite you were boasting of just now by eating this other wing of the chicken."

"Oh, mademoiselle, no!" said Michel, artlessly, "I am choking as it is."

"Then you must be a very poor eater. Come, obey; if not, as I am only here to serve you, I shall go."

"Mademoiselle," said Michel, stretching out both his hands, in one of which was a

fork, in the other a piece of bread,--"mademoiselle, you cannot be so cruel. Oh! if you only knew how sad and dismal I have been here for the last two hours in this utter solitude--"

"You were hungry; that explains it," said Mary, laughing.

"No, no, no; that was not it! I could see you from here, going and coming with all those officers."

"That was your own fault. Instead of taking refuge like an owl in this old turret, you ought to have come into the salon and gone with us to the dining-room and eaten your supper sitting, like a Christian, on a proper chair. You would have heard my father and General Dermoncourt relating adventures to make your flesh creep, and you would have seen the old weasel Loriot--as my father calls him--eating his supper, which was scarcely less alarming."

"Good God!" cried Michel.

"What?" asked Mary, surprised by the sudden exclamation.

"Maître Loriot, of Machecoul?"

"Maître Loriot, of Machecoul," repeated Mary.

"My mother's notary?"

"Ah, yes, that's true; so he is!" said Mary.

"Is he here?" asked Michel.

"Yes, of course he is here; and what do you think he came for?" continued Mary, laughing.

"What?"

"To look for you."

"For me?"

"Exactly; sent by the baroness."

"But, mademoiselle," cried Michel, much alarmed, "I don't wish to go back to La Logerie."

"Why not?"

"Because,--well, because they lock me up, they detain me; they want to keep me at a distance from--from my friends."

"Nonsense! La Logerie is not so very far from Souday."

"No; but Paris is far from Souday, and the baroness wants to take me to Paris. Did you tell that notary I was here?"

"No, indeed."

"Oh! I thank you, mademoiselle."

"You need not thank me, for I did not know it myself."

"But now that you do know it--"

Michel hesitated.

"Well, what?"

"You must not tell him, Mademoiselle Mary," said Michel, ashamed of his weakness.

"Upon my word, Monsieur Michel," replied Mary, "you must allow me to say one thing."

"Say it, mademoiselle; say it!"

"Well, it seems to me if I were a man Maître Loriot should not disturb me under any circumstances."

Michel seemed to gather all his strength in order to take a resolution.

"You are right," he said; "and I will go and tell him that I will not return to La Logerie."

At this moment they were startled by loud cries from the cook, calling to Rosine.

"Good heavens!" they both cried, one as frightened as the other.

"Do you hear that, mademoiselle?" said Rosine.

"Yes."

"They want me."

"Oh!" said Mary, rising, and all ready to flee away, "can they know we are here?"

"Suppose they do," said Rosine; "what does it matter?"

"Nothing," said Mary; "but--"

"Listen!" exclaimed Rosine.

They were silent, and the cook was heard to go away. Presently her voice was heard in the garden.

"Dear me!" said Rosine; "there she is, calling me outside."

And Rosine was for running down at once.

"Heavens!" cried Mary; "don't leave me here alone."

"Why, you are not alone," said Rosine, naïvely. "Monsieur Michel is here."

"Yes, but to get back to the house," stammered Mary.

"Why, mademoiselle," cried Rosine, astonished, "have you suddenly turned coward,--you so brave, who are in the woods by night as much as by day! It isn't a bit like you."

"Never mind; stay, Rosine."

"Well, for all the help I have been to you for the last half-hour I might as well go."

"Very true; but that's not what I want of you."

"What do you want?"

"Well, don't you see?"

"What?"

"Why, that this unfortunate boy can't pass the night here, in this room."

"Then where can he pass it?" asked Rosine.

"I don't know; but we must find him another room."

"Without telling the marquis?"

"Oh, true! my father doesn't know he is here. Good heavens! what's to be done? Ah, Monsieur Michel, it is all your fault!"

"Mademoiselle, I am ready to leave the house if you demand it."

"What makes you say that?" cried Mary, quickly. "No; on the contrary, stay."

"Mademoiselle Mary, an idea!" interrupted Rosine.

"What is it?"

"Suppose I go and ask Mademoiselle Bertha what we had better do?"

"No," replied Mary, with an eagerness which surprised herself; "no, that's useless! I will ask her myself presently when I go down, after Monsieur Michel has finished his wretched little supper."

"Very good; then I'll go now," said Rosine.

Mary dared not keep her longer. Rosine disappeared, leaving the two young people entirely alone.

XXXV.

WHICH ENDS QUITE OTHERWISE THAN AS MARY EXPECTED.

The little room was lighted only by the lantern, the rays of which were concentrated on the door, leaving in darkness, or at any rate in obscurity, the rest of the room,--if, indeed, the word "room" can be applied to the sort of pigeon-loft in which the two young people were now alone.

Michel was still sitting on the heap of oats. Mary was kneeling on the ground, looking into the basket with more embarrassment than interest, ostensibly in search

of some dainty which might still be forthcoming to conclude the repast.

But so many things had now happened that Michel was no longer hungry. His head was resting on his hand and his elbow on his knee. He was watching with a lover's eye the soft, sweet face before him, now foreshortened by the girl's attitude in a way to double the charm of her delicate features. He breathed in with delight the waves of perfumed air that came to him from the long fair curls, which the breeze entering through the window gently raised and wafted to his lips. At that contact, that perfume, that sight, his blood circulated more rapidly in his veins. He heard the arteries of his temples beating; he felt a quiver running through every limb until it reached his brain. Under the influence of sensations so new to him the young man felt his soul animated by unknown aspirations; he learned to will.

What he willed he felt to the depths of his soul; he willed to find some way of telling Mary that he loved her. He sought the best; but with all his seeking he found no better way than the simple means of taking her hand and carrying it to his lips. Suddenly he did it, without really knowing what he did.

"Monsieur Michel! Monsieur Michel!" cried Mary, more astonished than angry; "what are you doing?"

The young girl rose quickly. Michel saw that he had gone too far and must now go farther still and say all. It was he who now took Mary's posture; that is, he fell upon his knees and again took the hand which had escaped him. It is true that hand made no effort to avoid his clasp.

"Oh! can I have offended you?" he cried. "If that were so I should be most unhappy, and ask pardon of you on my knees."

"Monsieur Michel!" began the young girl, without knowing what she meant to say.

But the baron, afraid that the little hand might be snatched away from him, folded it in both his own; and as, on his side, he did not very well know what he was saying, he continued:--

"If I have abused your goodness, mademoiselle, tell me,--I implore you,--tell me that you are not angry with me."

"I will say so, monsieur, when you rise," said Mary, making a feeble effort to withdraw her hand. But the effort was so feeble it had no other result than to show Michel its captivity was not altogether forced upon her.

"No," said the young baron, under the influence of a growing ardor caused by the change from hope into something that was almost certainty,--"no, leave me at your feet. Oh! if you only knew how many times, since I have known you, I have dreamed of the moment when I should kneel thus at your feet; if you knew how that dream, mere dream as it was, gave me the sweetest sensations, the most delightful agony, you would let me enjoy the happiness which is at this moment a reality."

"But, Monsieur Michel," replied Mary, in a voice of increasing emotion as she spoke, for she felt she had reached the moment when she could have no further doubt as to the nature of his affection for her,--"Monsieur Michel, we should not kneel except to God and to the saints."

"I know not to whom we ought to kneel, nor why I kneel to you," said the young man. "What I feel is far beyond all that I ever felt before,--greater than my affection for my mother, so great that I do not know where to place or what to call the sentiment that leads me to adore you. It is something which belongs to the reverence you speak of, which we offer to God and to the saints. For me you are the whole creation; in adoring you it seems to me that I adore the universe itself."

"Oh, monsieur, cease to say such things! Michel! my friend!"

"No, no, leave me as I am; suffer me to consecrate myself to you with an absolute devotion. Alas! I feel,--believe me, I am not mistaken,--I feel, since I have seen men who are truly men, that the devotion of a timid, feeble child, which, alas! I am, is but a paltry thing at best; and yet it seems to me that the joy of suffering, of shedding my blood, of dying, if need be, for you, must be so infinite that the hope of winning

it would give me the strength and courage that I lack."

"Why talk of suffering and of death?" said Mary, in her gentle voice. "Do you think death and suffering absolutely necessary to prove an affection true?"

"Why do I speak of them, Mademoiselle Mary? Why do I call them to my aid? Because I dare not hope for another happiness; because to live happy, calm, and peaceful beside you, to enjoy your tenderness, in short, to make you my wife, seems to me a dream beyond all human hope. I cannot picture to my mind that such a dream should ever be reality for me."

"Poor child!" said Mary, in a voice of at least as much compassion as tenderness; "then you do indeed love me truly?"

"Oh, Mademoiselle Mary, why must I tell you? Why should I repeat it? Do you not see it with your eyes and with your heart? Pass your hand across my forehead bathed in sweat, place it on my heart that is beating wildly; see how my body trembles, and can you doubt I love you?"

The feverish excitement, which suddenly transformed the young man into another being, was communicated to Mary; she was no less agitated, no less trembling than himself. She forgot all,--the hatred of her father for all that bore the name of Michel, the repugnance of Madame de la Logerie toward her family, even the delusions Bertha cherished of Michel's love to herself, delusions which Mary had so many times determined to respect. The native warmth and ardor of her vigorous and primitive nature gained an ascendency over the reserve she had for some time thought it proper to assume. She was on the point of yielding wholly to the tenderness of her heart and of replying to that passionate love by a love even, perhaps, more passionate, when a slight noise at the door caused her to turn her head.

There stood Bertha, erect and motionless, on the threshold. The eye of the lantern, as we have said, was turned toward the door, so that the light was concentrated on

Bertha's face. Mary could therefore see plainly how white her sister was, and also how pain and anger were gathering upon that frowning brow and behind those lips so violently contracted. She was so terrified by the unexpected and almost menacing apparition that she pushed away the young man, whose hand had not left hers, and went up to her sister.

But Bertha, who had now entered the turret, did not stop to meet Mary. Pushing her aside with her hand as though she were an inert object, she went straight to Michel.

"Monsieur," she said, in a ringing voice, "has my sister not told you that Monsieur Loriot, your mother's notary, is in the salon and wishes to speak to you?"

Michel muttered a few words.

"You will find him in the salon," continued Bertha, in the tone of voice she would have used in giving an order.

Michel, cast suddenly back into his usual timidity and all his terrors, stood up in a confused and vacillating manner without saying a word, and turned to leave the room, like a child detected in a fault who obeys without having the courage to excuse himself.

Mary took the lantern to light him down, but Bertha snatched it from her hand and put it into that of the young man, making him a sign to go.

"But you, mademoiselle?" he ventured to say.

"We know the house," replied Bertha. Then stamping her foot impatiently, as she noticed that Michel's eyes were seeking those of Mary, "Go, go! I tell you; go!" she exclaimed.

The young man disappeared, leaving the two young girls without other light than the pale gleam of a half-veiled moon, which entered the turret through the narrow casement.

Left alone with her sister, Mary expected to be severely blamed for the impropriety

of her conduct in permitting such a tête-à-tête,--an impropriety of which she herself was now fully aware. In this she was mistaken. As soon as Michel had disappeared down the spiral stairway, and Bertha, with her ears strained to the door, had heard him leave the tower, she seized her sister's hand, and pressing it with a force which proved the violence of her feelings, asked in a choking voice:--

"What was he saying to you on his knees?"

For all answer Mary threw herself on her sister's neck, and in spite of Bertha's efforts to repulse her she wound her arms about her and kissed her, moistening Bertha's face with the tears that flowed from her own eyes.

"Why are you angry with me, dear sister?" she said.

"It is not being angry with you, Mary, to ask what a young man whom I find kneeling at your feet was saying to you."

"But this is not the way you usually speak to me."

"What matters it how I usually speak to you? What I wish and what I exact is that you answer my question."

"Bertha! Bertha!"

"Come, answer me; speak! What was he saying? I ask you what he said?" cried the girl, harshly, shaking her sister so violently by the arm that Mary gave a cry and sank to the floor as if about to faint.

The cry recalled Bertha to her natural feeling. This impetuous and violent nature, fundamentally kind, softened at the expression of the pain and distress she had wrung from her sister. She did not let her fall to the ground, but took her in her arms, raised her as though she were a child, and laid her on the bench, holding her all the while tightly embraced. Then she covered her with kisses, and a few tears, gushing from her eyes like sparks from a brazier, dropped upon Mary's cheek. Bertha wept as Maria Theresa wept,--her tears, instead of flowing, burst forth like lightning.

"Poor little thing! poor little thing!" she said, speaking to her sister as if to a child she had chanced to injure; "forgive me! I have hurt you, and, worse still, I have grieved you; oh, forgive me!" Then, gathering herself together, she repeated, "Forgive me! It is my fault. I ought to have opened my heart to you before letting you see that the strange love I feel for that man--that child," she added with a touch of scorn--"has such power over me that it makes me jealous of one whom I love better than all the world, better than life itself, better than I love him,--jealous of you! Ah! if you only knew, my poor Mary, the misery this senseless love, which I know to be beneath me, has already brought upon me! If you knew the struggles I have gone through to subdue it! how bitterly I deplore my weakness! There is nothing in him of all I respect, nothing of what I love,--neither distinction of race, nor religious faith, nor ardor, nor vigor, nor strength, nor courage; and yet, in spite of all, I love him! I loved him the first moment that I saw him. I love him so much that sometimes, breathless, frantic, bathed in perspiration, and suffering almost unspeakable anguish, I have cried aloud like one possessed, 'My God! make me die, but let him love me!' For the last few months--ever since, to my misfortune, we met him--the thought of this man has never left me for an instant. I feel for him some strange emotion, which must be that a woman feels to a lover, but which is really far more like the affection of a mother for her child. Each day that passes, my life is more bound up in him; I put not only my thoughts, but all my dreams, my hopes on him. Ah, Mary! Mary! just now I was asking you to pardon me; but now I say to you, pity me, sister! Oh, my sister, have pity upon me!"

And Bertha, quite beside herself, clasped her sister frantically in her arms.

Poor Mary had listened, trembling, to this explosion of an almost savage passion, such as the powerful and self-willed nature of Bertha alone could feel. Each cry, each word, each sentence tore to shreds the rosy vapors which a few moments earlier she had seen on the horizon. Her sister's impetuous voice swept those fragments from her sight, as the gust of a rising tempest sweeps the light, fleecy

clouds before it. Her grief and bewilderment was such during Bertha's last words that the latter's silence alone warned her she was expected to reply. She made a great effort over herself, striving to check her sobs.

"Oh, sister," she said, "my heart is breaking; my grief is all the greater because what has happened to-night is partly my fault."

"No, no!" cried Bertha, with her accustomed violence. "It was I who ought to have looked to see what became of him when we left the chapel. But," she continued, with that pertinacity of ideas which characterizes persons who are violently in love, "what was he saying to you? Why was he kneeling at your feet?"

Mary felt that Bertha shuddered as she asked the question; she herself trembled violently at the thought of what she had to answer. It seemed to her that each word by which she was forced to explain the truth to Bertha would scorch her lips as they left her heart.

"Come, come!" said Bertha, weeping, her tears having more effect on Mary than her anger,--"Come, tell me, dear sister; have pity on me! The suspense is worse a hundred-fold than any pain. Tell me, tell me; did he speak to you of love?"

Mary could not lie; or rather, self-devotion had not yet taught her to do so.

"Yes," she said.

"Oh, my God! my God!" cried Bertha, tearing herself from her sister's breast and falling, with outstretched arms, her face against the wall.

There was such a tone of absolute despair in the cry that Mary was terrified. She forgot Michel, she forgot her love; she forgot all except her sister. The sacrifice before which her heart had quailed at the moment when she first heard that Bertha loved Michel, she now made valiantly, with sublime self-abnegation; for she smiled, with a breaking heart.

"Foolish girl that you are!" she cried, springing to Bertha's neck; "let me finish what

I have to say."

"Did you not tell me that he spoke of love?" replied the suffering creature.

"Yes; but I did not tell you whom he loves."

"Mary! Mary! have pity on my heart!"

"Bertha! dear Bertha!"

"Was it of me he spoke?"

Mary had not the strength to reply in words; she made a sign of acquiescence with her head.

Bertha breathed heavily, passed her hand several times over her burning forehead. The shock had been too violent to allow her to recover instantly her normal condition.

"Mary," she said, "what you have just told me seems so unlikely, so impossible, that you must swear it. Swear to me--" She hesitated.

"I will swear what you will, sister," said Mary, who was eager herself to put some insurmountable barrier between her heart and her love.

"Swear to me that Michel does not love you, and that you do not love him." She laid her hand on her sister's shoulder. "Swear it by our mother's grave."

"I swear, by the grave of our mother," said Mary, resolutely, "that I will never marry Michel."

She threw herself into her sister's arms, seeking compensation for her sacrifice in the caresses the latter gave her. If the room had been less dark Bertha might have seen on Mary's features the anguish that oath had cost her. As it was, it restored all Bertha's calmness. She sighed gently, as though her heart were lightened of a heavy weight.

"Thank you!" she said; "oh, thank you! thank you! Now let us return to the salon."

But, half-way down, Mary made an excuse to go to her room. There she locked

herself in to pray and weep.

The company had not yet left the supper-table. As Bertha crossed the vestibule to reach the salon she heard bursts of laughter from the guests.

When she entered the salon Monsieur Loriot was arguing with the young baron, endeavoring to persuade him that it was his interest as well as his duty to return to La Logerie. But the negative silence of the young man was so eloquent that the notary presently found himself at the end of his arguments. It is true, however, that he had been talking for half an hour.

Michel was probably not less embarrassed than the notary himself, and he welcomed Bertha as a battalion formed in a hollow square and attacked on all sides welcomes an auxiliary who will strengthen its defence. He sprang to meet her with an eagerness which owed as much to his present difficulty as to the closing scene of his interview with Mary.

To his great surprise, Bertha, incapable of concealing for a moment what she was feeling, stretched out her hand and pressed his with effusion. She mistook the meaning of the young man's eager advance, and from being content she became radiant.

Michel, who expected quite another reception, did not feel at his ease. However, he immediately recovered himself so far as to say to Loriot:--

"You will tell my mother, monsieur, that a man of principle finds actual duties in his political opinions, and that I decide to die, if need be, in accomplishing mine."

Poor boy! he was confounding love with duty.

XXXVI.

BLUE AND WHITE.

It was almost two in the morning when the Marquis de Souday proposed to his guests to return to the salon. They left the table in that satisfied condition which

always follows a plenteous repast if the master of the house is in good-humor, the guests hungry, and the topics of conversation interesting enough to fill the spare moments of the chief occupation.

In proposing to adjourn to the salon the marquis had probably no other idea than change of atmosphere; for as he rose he ordered Rosine and the cook to follow him with the liqueurs, and to array the bottles with a sufficient number of glasses on a table in the salon.

Then, humming the great air in "Richard, C[oe]ur-de-Lion," and paying no heed to the fact that the general replied by a verse from the "Marseillaise," which the noble panels of the castle of Souday heard, no doubt, for the first time, the old gentleman, having filled all glasses, was preparing to resume a very interesting controversy as to the treaty of Jaunaye, which the general insisted had only sixteen articles, when the latter, pointing to the clock, called his attention to the time of night.

Dermoncourt said, laughing, that he suspected the marquis of intending to paralyze his enemies by the delights of a new Capua; and the marquis, accepting the joke with infinite tact and good-will, hastened to yield to his guests' wishes and took them at once to the bedrooms assigned to them, after which he betook himself to his own.

The Marquis de Souday, excited by the warlike inclinations of his mind and by the conversation which enlivened the evening, dreamed of combats. He was fighting a battle, compared to which those of Torfou, Laval, and Sanmur were child's play; he was in the act of advancing under a shower of shot and shell, leading his division to the assault of a redoubt, and planting the white flag in the midst of the enemy's intrenchments, when a rapping at his door interrupted his exploits.

In the dozing condition which preceded his full awakening, the dream continued, and the noise at his door was the roar of cannon. Then, little by little, the clouds rolled away from his brain, the worthy old gentleman opened his eyes, and, instead

of a battlefield covered with broken gun-carriages, gasping horses, and dead bodies, over which he thought he was leaping, he found himself lying on his narrow camp bed of painted wood draped with modest white curtains edged with red.

The knocking was renewed.

"Come in!" cried the marquis, rubbing his eyes. "Ha! bless me, general, you've come just in time," he cried; "two minutes more, and you were dead."

"How so?"

"Yes, by a sword-thrust I was just putting through you."

"By way of retaliation, my good friend," said the general, holding out his hand.

"That's how I take it. But I see you are looking rather puzzled by my poor room; its shabbiness surprises you. Yes, there is some difference between this bare, forlorn place, with its horsehair chairs and carpetless floor, and the fine apartments of your Parisian lords. But I can't help it. I spent one third of my life in camps and another third in penury, and this little cot with its thin mattress seems to me luxury enough for my old age. But what in the world brings you here at this early hour, general? It is hardly light yet."

"I came to bid you good-bye, my kind host," replied the general.

"Already? Ah, see what life is! I must tell you now that only yesterday I had all sorts of prejudices against you before your arrival."

"Had you? And yet you welcomed me most cordially."

"Bah!" said the marquis, laughing; "you've been in Egypt. Did you never receive a few shots from the midst of a cool and pleasant oasis?"

"Bless me, yes! The Arabs regard an oasis as the best of ambuscades."

"Well, I was something of an Arab last night; and I say my mea culpa, regretting it all the more because I am really and truly sorry you leave me so soon."

"Is it because there is still an unexplored corner of your oasis you want me to see?"

"No; it is because your frankness, loyalty, and the community of dangers we have shared (in opposite camps) inspired me--I scarcely know why, but instantly--with a sincere and deep regard for you."

"On your word as a gentleman?"

"On my word as a gentleman and a soldier."

"Well, then, I offer you my friendship in return, my dear enemy," replied Dermoncourt. "I expected to find an old émigré, powdered like a white frost, stiff and haughty, and larded with antediluvian prejudices--"

"And you've found out that a man may wear powder and have no prejudices,--is that it, general?"

"I found a frank and loyal heart and an amiable,--bah! let's say the word openly,--jovial nature, and this with exquisite manners, which might seem to exclude all that; in short, you've seduced an old veteran, who is heartily yours."

"Well, it gives me a great deal of pleasure to hear you say so. Come, stay one more day with me!"

"Impossible!"

"Well, I have nothing to say against that decisive word; but make me a promise that you will pay me a visit after the peace, if we are both of us still living."

"After the peace!" cried the general, laughing. "Are we at war?"

"We are between peace and war."

"Yes, the happy medium."

"Well, let us say after the happy medium. Promise you will come and see me then?"

"Yes, I give you my word."

"And I shall hold you to it."

"But come, let us talk seriously," said the general, taking a chair and sitting down at

the foot of the old émigré's bed.

"I am willing," replied the latter, "for once in a way."

"You love hunting?"

"Passionately."

"What kind?"

"All kinds."

"But there must be one kind you prefer?"

"Yes, boar-hunting. That reminds me most of hunting the Blues."

"Thanks."

"Boars and Blues,--they both charge alike."

"What do you say to fox-hunting?"

"Peuh!" exclaimed the marquis, sticking out his underlip like a prince of the House of Austria.

"Well, it is a fine sport," said the general.

"I leave that to Jean Oullier, who has wonderful tact and patience in watching a covert."

"He is good at watching other game than foxes, your Jean Oullier," remarked the general.

"Yes, yes; he's clever at all game, no doubt."

"Marquis, I wish you would take a fancy to fox-hunting."

"Why?"

"Because England is the land for it; and I have a fancy that the air of England would be very good just now for you and your young ladies."

"Goodness!" said the marquis, sitting up in bed.

"Yes, I have the honor to tell you so, my dear host."

"Which means that you are advising me to emigrate? No, thank you."

"Do you call an agreeable little trip emigration?"

"My dear general, those little trips, I know what they are,--worse than a journey round the world; you know when they begin, but nobody knows when they'll end. And, besides, there is one thing--you will hardly, perhaps, believe it--"

"What is that?"

"You saw yesterday, I may say this morning, that in spite of my age I have a very tolerable appetite; and I can certify that I never had an indigestion in my life. I can eat anything without being made uncomfortable."

"Well?"

"Well, that devilish London fog, I never could digest it. Isn't that curious?"

"Very good; then go to Italy, Spain, Switzerland, wherever you please, but don't stay at Souday. Leave Machecoul; leave La Vendée."

"Ha! ha! ha!"

"Yes, yes."

"Can it be that I am compromised?" said the marquis, half to himself, and rubbing his hands cheerfully.

"If you are not now, you will be soon."

"At last!" cried the old gentleman, joyously.

"No joking," said the general, becoming serious. "If I listened to my duty only, my dear marquis, you would find two sentries at your door and a sub-lieutenant in the chair where I am now sitting."

"Hey!" cried the marquis, a shade more serious.

"Yes, upon my word, that's the state of things. But I can understand how a man of your age, accustomed as you are to an active life in the free air of the forests, would

suffer cooped up in a prison where the civil authorities would probably put you; and I give you a proof of my sympathetic friendship in what I said just now, though in doing so I am, in a measure, compromising with my strict duty."

"But suppose you are blamed for it, general?"

"Pooh! do you suppose I can't find excuses enough? A senile old man, worn-out, half-imbecile, who tried to stop the column on its march--"

"Of whom are you speaking, pray?"

"Why, you, of course."

"I a senile old man, worn-out, half-imbecile!" cried the marquis, sticking one muscular leg out of bed. "I'm sure I don't know, general, why I don't unhook those swords on the wall and stake our breakfast on the first blood, as we did when I was a lad and a page forty-five years ago."

"Come, come, old child!" cried Dermoncourt; "you are so bent on proving I have made a mistake that I shall have to call in the soldiers after all."

And the general pretended to rise.

"No, no," said the marquis; "no, damn it! I am senile, worn-out, half-imbecile, wholly imbecile,--anything you like, in short."

"Very good; that's all right."

"But will you tell me how and by whom I am, or shall be, compromised?"

"In the first place, your servant, Jean Oullier--"

"Yes."

"The fox man--"

"I understand."

"Your servant, Jean Oullier,--a thing I neglected to tell you last night, supposing that you knew as much about it as I did,--your man, Jean Oullier, at the head of a lot of

seditious rioters, attempted to stop the column which was ordered to surround the château de Souday. In attempting this he brought about several fights, in which we lost three men killed, not counting one whom I myself did justice on, and who belongs, I think, in these parts."

"What was his name?"

"François Tinguy."

"Hush! general, don't mention it here, for pity's sake. His sister lives in this house,--the young girl who waited on you at table last night,--and her father is only just buried."

"Ah, these civil wars! the devil take them!" said the general.

"And yet they are the only logical wars."

"Maybe. However, I captured your Jean Oullier, and he got away."

"He did well,--you must own that?"

"Yes; but if he falls into my grip again--"

"Oh, there's no danger of that; once warned, I'll answer for him."

"So much the better, for I shouldn't be indulgent to him. I haven't talked of the great war with him, as I have with you."

"But he fought through it, though, and bravely, too."

"Reason the more; second offence."

"But, general," said the marquis, "I can't see, so far, how the conduct of my keeper can be twisted into a crime of mine."

"Wait, and you will see. You said last night that imps came and told you all I did between seven and ten o'clock that evening."

"Yes."

"Well, I have imps, too, and they are every bit as good as yours."

"I doubt it."

"They have told me all that happened in your castle yesterday."

"Go on," said the marquis, incredulously; "I'm listening."

"On the previous evening two persons came to stay at the château de Souday."

"Good! you are better than your word. You promised to tell me what happened yesterday, and now you begin with the day before yesterday."

"These two persons were a man and a woman."

The marquis shook his head, negatively.

"So be it; call them two men, though one of them had nothing but the clothes of our sex."

The marquis said nothing, and the general continued:

"Of these two personages, one, the smaller, spent the whole day at the castle; the other rode about the neighborhood, and gave rendezvous that evening at Souday to a number of gentlemen. If I were indiscreet I would tell you their names; but I will only mention that of the gentleman who summoned them,--namely, the Comte de Bonneville."

The marquis made no reply. He must either acknowledge or lie.

"What next?" he said.

"These gentlemen arrived at Souday, one after the other. They discussed various matters, the most calming of which was certainly not the glory, prosperity, and duration of the government of July."

"My dear general, admit that you are not one whit more in love than I with your government of July, though you serve it."

"What's that you are saying?"

"Eh? good God! I'm saying that you are a republican, blue, dark-blue; and a true

dark-blue is a fast color."

"That's not the question."

"What is it then?"

"I am talking of the strangers who assembled in this house last night between eight and nine o'clock."

"Well, suppose I did receive a few neighbors, suppose I even welcomed two strangers, where's the crime, general? I've got the Code at my fingers' ends,--unless, indeed, the old revolutionary law against suspected persons is revived."

"There is no crime in neighbors visiting you; but there is crime when those neighbors assemble for a conference in which an uprising and resort to arms is discussed."

"How can that be proved?"

"By the presence of the two strangers."

"Pooh!"

"Most certainly; for the smaller and fairer of the strangers, the one who, being fair, wore a black wig to disguise herself, was no less a person than the Princess Marie-Caroline, whom you call regent of the kingdom,--her Royal Highness Madame la Duchesse de Berry, who is now pleased to call herself Petit-Pierre."

The marquis bounded in his bed. The general was better informed than he, and what he was now told entered his mind like a flash of light. He could hardly contain himself for joy at the thought that he had received Madame la Duchesse de Berry under his roof; but, unhappily, as joy is never perfect in this world, he was forced to repress his satisfaction.

"Go on," he said; "what next?"

"Well, the next is that just as you had reached the most interesting part of the discussion, a young man, whom one would scarcely expect to find in your camp,

came and warned you that I and my troops were on our way to the château. And then you, Monsieur le marquis (you won't deny this, I am sure), you proposed to resist; but the contrary was decided on. Mademoiselle, your daughter, the dark one--"

"Bertha."

"Mademoiselle Bertha took a light. She left the room, and every one present, except you, Monsieur le marquis, who probably set about preparing for the new guests whom Heaven was sending you,--every one present followed her. She crossed the courtyard and went to the chapel; there she opened the door, passed in first, and went straight to the altar. Pushing a spring hidden in the left forepaw of the lamb carved on the front of the altar, she tried to open a trap-door. The spring, which had probably not been used for some time, resisted. Then she took the bell used for the mass, the handle of which is of wood, and pressed it on the button. The panel instantly yielded, and opened the way to a staircase leading to the vaults. Mademoiselle Bertha then took two wax-tapers from the altar, lighted them, and gave them to two of the persons who accompanied her. Then, your guests having gone down into the vault, she closed the panel behind them, and returned, as did another person, who did not immediately enter the house, but, on the contrary, wandered about the park for some time. As for the fugitives, when they reached the farther end of the subterranean passage, which opens, you know, among the ruins of the old château that I see from here, they had some difficulty in forcing their way through the piles of stones that cover the ground. One of them actually fell. However, they managed to reach the covered way which skirts the park wall; there they stopped to deliberate. Three took the road from Nantes to Machecoul, two followed the crossroad which leads to Légé, and the sixth and seventh doubled themselves,--I should rather say, made themselves into one--"

"Look here! is this a fairy tale you are telling me, general?"

"Wait, wait! You interrupt me at the most interesting part of all. I was telling you

that the sixth and seventh doubled up; that is, the larger took the smaller on his back and went to the little brook that runs into the great rivulet flowing round the base of the Viette des Biques. Now as they are the ones I prefer among your company, I shall set my dogs of war on them."

"But, my dear general," cried the Marquis de Souday, "I do assure you all this exists only in your imagination."

"Come, come, my old enemy! You are Master of Wolves, are not you?"

"Yes."

"Well, when you see the print of a young boar's paw sharply defined in soft earth,--a clear trail as you call it,--would you let any one persuade you into thinking it was only the ghost of a tusker? Well, marquis, that trail, I have seen it, or rather, I should say, I have read it."

"The devil!" cried the marquis, turning in his bed with the admiring curiosity of an amateur; "then I wish you'd just tell me how you did it."

"Willingly," replied the general. "But we have still a good half-hour before us. Order up a pâté and a bottle of wine, and I'll tell you the rest between two mouthfuls."

"On one condition."

"And that is?"

"That I may share the meal."

"At this early hour?"

"Real appetites don't carry a watch."

The marquis jumped out of bed, put on his flannel trousers, slipped his feet into his slippers, rang, ordered up a breakfast, covered a table, and sat down before the general with an interrogating air.

The general, put to the test of proving his words, began, as he said, between two mouthfuls. He was a good talker, and a better eater than even the marquis.

XXXVII.

WHICH SHOWS THAT IT IS NOT FOR FLIES ONLY THAT SPIDERS' WEBS ARE DANGEROUS.

"You know, my dear marquis," began the general, by way of exordium, "that I don't inquire into any of your secrets. I am so perfectly sure, so profoundly convinced that everything happened precisely as I tell you, that I'll excuse you from telling me that I am mistaken or not mistaken. All I want to do is to prove to you, as a matter of self-respect, that we have as good a nose for a scent in our camp as you have in your forest,--a small satisfaction of vanity which I am bent on getting, that's all."

"Go on, go on!" cried the marquis, as impatient as if Jean Oullier had come to tell him on a fine snowy day that he had roused a wolf.

"We'll begin with the beginning. I knew that M. le Comte de Bonneville had arrived at your house the night before last, accompanied by a little peasant, who had all the appearance of being a woman in disguise, and whom we suspect to be Madame. But this is only a report of spies; it doesn't figure in my own inventory," added the general.

"I should hope not; pah!" said the marquis.

"But when I arrived here in person, as we military fellows say in our bulletin French, without being, I must assure you, at all misled by the extreme politeness which you lavished upon us, I at once remarked two things."

"What were they?"

"First, that out of ten places laid at the supper-table, five had napkins rolled up, evidently belonging to certain regular guests; which fact, in case of a trial, my dear marquis--don't forget this--would be an eminently extenuating circumstance."

"Why so?"

"Because if you had known the rank and quality of your guests you would hardly

have allowed them to roll their napkins like ordinary country neighbors, would you? The linen closets of Souday can't be so short of napkins that Madame la Duchesse de Berry couldn't have a clean one for every meal. I am therefore inclined to believe that the blonde lady disguised in the black wig was nothing more to your mind than a dark young lad."

"Go on, go on!" cried the marquis, biting his lips at this revelation of a perspicacity so far exceeding his own.

"I intend to go on," said the general. "So, as I say, I noticed five rolled napkins, which proved that the supper, or dinner, was not so entirely prepared for us as you tried to make me believe, and that you simply gave us the places of Monsieur de Bonneville and his companion and others, who had judged it best not to wait for our arrival."

"Now for your second observation?" said the marquis.

"Mademoiselle Bertha, whom I suppose and believe to be a very neat young lady, was, when you did me the honor to present me to her, singularly covered with cobwebs; they were even in her beautiful hair."

"Well?"

"Well, certain as I was that she had not chosen that style of adornment out of coquetry, I looked about this morning for a part of the château that was well supplied with the toil of those interesting insects, the spiders."

"And you discovered--?"

"Faith! what I discovered doesn't redound to the honor of your religious sentiments, my dear marquis, or, at any rate, to your practice of them; for it was precisely across the doorway of your chapel that I found a dozen spiders working with unimaginable zeal to repair the damage done last night to their webs,--a zeal no doubt inspired by the belief that the opening of the door where they had fixed their homes was only an accident not likely to occur again."

"You must allow, my dear general, that all these indications are somewhat vague."

"Yes, but when your hounds turn their noses to the wind and strain at the leash, that is nothing more than a vague indication, is it? And yet on that indication yon beat the woods with care, and very great care, too."

"Certainly," said the marquis.

"Well, that's my way also. Then, on your paths (where, by the bye, gravel is essentially lacking), I have discovered some very significant tracks."

"Steps of men and women?" exclaimed the marquis. "Pooh! they are everywhere."

"No, there are not everywhere steps crowded together and going in one direction, according to what I suppose to be the number of actors on the scene,--steps, too, of persons who were not walking, but running together."

"But how in the world could you tell that those persons were running?"

"Why, marquis, that's the A B C of the business."

"Tell me, quick!"

"Because their footmarks are more from the toes than the heels, and the earth is pushed backward. Isn't that the way to tell, my dear Master of Wolves?"

"Right," said the marquis, with the air of a connoisseur; "quite right. What next?"

"Next?"

"Yes."

"I examined the footprints; there were men's steps of various sizes and shapes, boots, shoes, and hob-nail soles. Then in the midst of all these masculine feet what did I see but the print of a woman's foot, slender and arched, Cinderella's foot,--a foot to put all the Andalusian women to shame from Cordova to Cadiz; and that, too, in spite of the heavy nailed shoes which contained it."

"Well, well! skip that."

"Skip it! why?"

"Because, if you say another word you'll be in love with that delicate foot in a hobnailed shoe."

"The truth is, I would give anything to hold it. Perhaps I shall. It was on the steps of the chapel and on the pavement within it that these traces were most observable; mud had left its own marks on the polished floor. I also found, near the altar, droppings from wax-tapers close to a long, thin footprint, which I would swear to be Mademoiselle Bertha's; and as other droppings were close to the outside of the trap-door, I concluded that your daughter held the light in her left hand, while she put the key with her right into the lock. However, without this last proof, the cobwebs--in fragments at the door, and tangled in her hair--proved to me conclusively that it was she who aided the escape."

"Very well; continue."

"The rest is hardly worth telling. The lamb's paw was broken, and left exposed a small steel button which worked a spring; therefore I had no merit in that discovery. It resisted my efforts as it did those of Mademoiselle Bertha, who, by the bye, scratched her finger and drew blood, leaving a little fresh trace of it on the carved wood. Like her, I looked for some hard thing to push in the little button, and like her again, I spied the wooden handle of the bell, which retained not only the marks of the pressure of the night before but also a little trace of blood."

"Bravo!" cried the marquis, evidently beginning to take a double interest in the narration.

"So, as you will readily believe," continued Dermoncourt, "I went down into the vault. The footprints of the fugitives were perfectly distinct on the damp, sandy soil. One of the party fell as they went through the ruins; I know this because I saw a thick tuft of nettles bruised and beaten down, which we may be sure, considering the unamiable nature of that plant, was not done intentionally. In a corner of the ruins,

opposite to the door, stones had been moved, as if to facilitate the passage of some delicate person. Among the nettles growing beside the wall I found the two tapers, thrown away as soon as the party reached the open air. Finally, and in conclusion, I found footsteps in the road, and then, as they separated there, I was able to class them in the manner I have already described to you."

"No, no; that's not the conclusion."

"Not the conclusion? yes, it is."

"No; who told you that one of these persons took another on his back?"

"Ah, marquis, you want to catch me tripping in discernment. The pretty little foot in the hobnailed shoe,--that charming foot that captivates me so much that I have neither peace nor rest till I have overtaken it, that delicate little foot, no longer than a child's nor wider than my two fingers,--well, I saw it in the vaults, also in the covered way behind the ruins, and at the place where they all stopped and deliberated before they parted. Then, suddenly, close to a huge stone, which the rain must usually keep clean, but which, on the contrary, I now found covered with mud, those dainty footsteps disappeared. From that moment, like the hippogriffs who no longer exist in our days, Monsieur de Bonneville, I presume, took his companion on his back. The footprints of the said Monsieur de Bonneville became suddenly heavier; they were no longer those of a lively, active youth, such as you and I were at his age, marquis. Don't you remember how the wild-sows when with young make heavier tracks, and their hoof-marks, instead of just pricking the earth, are placed flat with the two points separate? Well, from the stone I spoke of, M. de Bonneville's footsteps grew heavier in the same way."

"But you have forgotten something, general."

"I think not."

"Oh! I sha'n't let you off yet. What makes you think that Monsieur de Bonneville spent the day riding about to summon my neighbors to council?"

"You told me yourself you had not gone out."

"Well?"

"Well, your horse, the one you always ride,--as that pretty little wench who took my bridle told me,--your favorite horse, which I saw in the stable when I went to make sure that my own Bucephalus had his provender, was covered with mud to the withers. Now, some one had ridden that horse, and you would never have lent him to any one for whom you did not feel some special consideration."

"Good! Now another question."

"Certainly; I am here to answer questions."

"What makes you think that Monsieur de Bonneville's companion is the august personage you named just now?"

"Partly because she is evidently made to pass first, before others, and the stones are moved out of her way."

"Can you tell by a mere footprint whether the person who made it is fair or dark?"

"No; but I can find it out in another way."

"How? This shall be my last question; and if you answer it--"

"If I answer it, what?"

"Nothing. Go on."

"Well, my dear marquis, you were so good as to give me the bedroom occupied the night before by Monsieur de Bonneville's companion."

"Yes, I did so; what of it?"

"Well, here is a pretty little tortoise-shell comb, which I found at the foot of the bed. You must admit, my dear marquis, that it is too dainty and coquettish to belong to a peasant lad. Besides, it contained, and still contains, as you may see, some long meshes of light brown hair, not at all of the golden shade that adorns your younger daughter's head,--the only blond head in your house."

"General!" cried the marquis, bounding from his chair, and flinging his knife and fork across the room, "arrest me if you like, but I tell you, once for all, I won't go to England; no, I won't, I won't, I won't!"

"Well, well, marquis, what's the matter with you, hey?"

"The devil! You've stimulated my ambition, you've spurred my pride and my self-love. Though I know, if you come to Souday--as you've promised, mind you, after the campaign is over--I shall have nothing to tell you equal to your own performances."

"Listen to me, my old and excellent enemy," said the general. "I have given you my word not to arrest you, this time at least, and whatever you may do, or rather, whatever you may have done, I shall keep my word; but I do entreat you, in the name of the interest you have inspired in me, in the name of your charming daughters, do not commit the folly on which you are bent, and if you will not leave France, at least stay quietly at home."

"And why?"

"Because the memories of those heroic times, which are making your heart beat now are but memories; because the emotions of the great and glorious actions you would like to see renewed are gone forever; because the day of great deeds of arms, of devotion without conditions, of deaths sublime in constancy, are passed without recall. Oh! I knew her, I knew her well, that unconquerable Vendée. I can say so,--I who bear the scars of her steel upon my breast. Well, I have been for the last month in the midst of her, in the midst of the places of the past, and I tell you I look for her old self in vain; I cannot find it, and no one can find it. My poor marquis, count up the few young gallant fellows, whose brave hearts dare to face the struggle, count up the veteran heroes who, like you, think that the duty of 1793 is still a duty in 1832, and see for yourself that a struggle so unequal is sheer madness."

"It will not be less glorious for that, my dear general," cried the marquis, forgetting

in his enthusiasm the political position of his companion.

"No, no; it will not be glorious in any sense. All that happens,--you'll see, and when you do, remember that I foretold it to you,--all that is now about to happen will be colorless, barren, puny, stunted; and on both sides, too. Yes, my God! with us as well as with you: with us, petty motives, base betrayals; with you, self-seeking compromises, contemptible meannesses, which will cut you to the heart, my poor marquis, which will kill you,--you, whom the balls of the Blues have left untouched."

"You see things as a partisan of the established government, general; you forget that we have many friends even in your own ranks, and that when we say the word this whole region will rise as one man."

The general shook his shoulders.

"In my time, old comrade,--allow me to call you so," he said,--"all that was Blue was Blue; all that was White was White. There was, to be sure, something red,--the executioner and his guillotine: but don't let us speak of that. You had no friends in our ranks, we had none in yours; and it was that which made us equally strong, equally great, equally terrible. At a word from you La Vendée will rise, you say? You are mistaken. La Vendée, which went to its death in 1795, relying on the coming of a prince whose word she trusted, and who failed her, will not rise now; no, not even when she sees the Duchesse de Berry within her borders. Your peasants have lost that political faith which moves human mountains, which drives them one against another, clashing together until they sink in a sea of blood,--that faith which begets and perpetuates martyrs. We ourselves, marquis,--I am forced to acknowledge it,--no longer possess that passion for liberty, progress, glory, which shook the old worlds to their centres, and gave birth to heroes. The civil war which is about to break out--if, indeed, there must be a civil war, and if it must break out--will be just such a war as Barême describes: a war in which victory is certain to

be on the side of the big battalions, the best exchequer. And that is why I say to you, count the cost, count it twice over, before you fling yourself into this mad folly."

"You are mistaken; I tell you, general, you are mistaken. We are not without an army, without soldiers; and, more fortunate than in former times, we have a leader whose sex will electrify the cautious, rally all devotions, and silence contending ambitions."

"Poor, valorous young woman! poor, noble, poetic spirit!" said the old soldier, in a tone of the deepest pity, dropping his scarred brow upon his breast. "Presently she will have no more relentless enemy than myself; but while I am still in this room, on neutral ground, I will tell you how I admire her resolution, her courage, her persistent tenacity, and how truly I deplore that she was born in an epoch that is no longer of the measure of her soul. The times have changed, marquis, since Jeanne de Montfort had but to strike the soil of Brittany with her mailed heel for warriors to spring up fully armed from it. Marquis, remember what I predict to you this day, and repeat it to that poor woman, if you see her,--namely, that her noble heart, more valiant even than that of Comtesse Jeanne, will receive, as the reward of her abnegation, her energy, her devotion, her sublime elevation of soul as princess and mother, only indifference, ingratitude, baseness, cowardice, treachery of all kinds. And now, my dear marquis, make your decision, say your last word."

"My last word, general, is like my first."

"Repeat it, then."

"I will not go to England," said the old man, firmly.

"Listen," continued Dermoncourt, laying a hand on the marquis's shoulder, and looking him in the eyes. "You are as proud as a Gascon, Vendéan though you be. Your revenues are small, I know that,--oh, don't begin to frown in that way; let me finish what I have to say,--damn it, you know I wouldn't offer you anything I wouldn't accept myself."

The marquis's face returned to its first expression.

"I was saying," continued the general, "that your revenues are slender; and in this cursed region of country it is not enough to possess revenues, great or small,--you must also collect them. Well, that's difficult; and if you can't get the money to cross the straits and hire a little cottage somewhere in England,--well, I'm not rich, I have only my pay, but I have managed to lay by a few hundred louis (a comrade accepts such things, you know); won't you take them? After the peace, as you say, you can pay them back."

"Stop! stop!" said the marquis; "you know me only since yesterday, and you treat me like a friend of twenty years' standing." The old Vendéan scratched his ear, and added, as if speaking to himself, "How could I ever show my gratitude for such an act?"

"Then you accept it?"

"No, no; I refuse it."

"But you will go?"

"I stay."

"God keep you then in health and safety!" said the old general, his patience exhausted. "Only, it is likely that chance, the devil take it! will bring us face to face together once more, as we were formerly; and now that I know you, if there is a hand-to-hand fight, such as there used to be in the old days, at Laval, hey? I swear I'll seek you out."

"And I'll seek you," cried the marquis; "I'll shout for you with all my lungs. I'd be thankful and proud to show these greenhorns what the men of the old war were."

"Well, there's the bugle sounding; I must go. Adieu, marquis, and thank you for your hospitality."

"Au revoir, general, and thanks for a friendship which I must prove to you I share."

The two old men shook hands, and Dermoncourt went away. The marquis, as he dressed himself, watched the little column disappearing up the avenue in the direction of the forest. At a couple of hundred paces from the château the general ordered a half-turn to the right; then, stopping his horse, he gave a last look at the little pointed turrets of his new friend's abode. Seeing the marquis at a window, he waved him a last adieu, and then, turning rein, he rejoined his men.

After following with his eyes, as long as they were visible, the detachment and the man who commanded it, the marquis turned from the window, and as he did so he heard a slight scratching on a little door behind his bed, which communicated, through a dressing-room, with the backstairs.

"Who the devil is coming this way?" he thought, drawing the bolt.

The door opened immediately, and gave entrance to Jean Oullier.

"Jean Oullier!" cried the marquis, in a tone of actual joy. "Is it you? are you really here, my good Jean Oullier? Ha! faith! the day has begun under good auspices."

He held out his hand to his keeper, who pressed it with a lively expression of respect and gratitude. Then, disengaging his hand, Jean Oullier produced from his pocket and gave to the marquis a piece of coarse paper folded into the shape of a letter. M. de Souday opened and read it. As he read his face beamed with joy unspeakable.

"Jean Oullier," he said, "call the young ladies; assemble all my people! No, no; stop! don't assemble any of them yet. Polish up my sword, my pistols, my carbine, all my war accoutrements; give Tristan oats. The campaign opens! My dear Jean Oullier, the campaign is opening! Bertha! Mary! Bertha!"

"Monsieur le marquis," said Jean Oullier, calmly, "the campaign has been opened for me since yesterday at three o'clock."

The sisters now rushed in, hearing their father's call, Mary's eyes were red and swollen. Bertha was radiant.

"Young ladies! girls!" cried the marquis; "you are in it! You are to come with me! Here, read this."

And he held out to Bertha the letter Jean Oullier had just given him. The letter was thus worded:--

MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS DE SOUDAY,--It is desirable for the cause of King Henri V. that you hasten by several days the call to arms. Have the goodness, therefore, to assemble all the most devoted men that you have in the district which you command, and hold yourself and them, especially yourself, at my immediate orders.

I think that two more amazons in our little army will help to spur on the love and the self-love of our friends, and I ask you, my dear marquis, to be so very kind as to grant me your beautiful and charming huntresses as my aides-de-camp.

Your affectionate PETIT-PIERRE.

"Well," said Bertha, "are we to go?"

"Of course!" exclaimed the marquis.

"Then allow me, papa," said Bertha, "to present to you a recruit."

"As many as you like."

Mary was silent and motionless. Bertha left the room, and returned in a few moments, leading Michel by the hand.

"Baron Michel de la Logerie," said the girl, dwelling on the title, "wishes to prove to you papa, that his Majesty Louis XVIII. was not mistaken in granting his family a patent of nobility."

The marquis, who had frowned at the name of Michel, softened his aspect.

"I shall follow with interest any efforts Monsieur Michel may make with that object in view," he said, at last, uttering those dignified words in a tone the Emperor Napoleon might have used on the eve of the battle of Marengo.

XXXVIII.

IN WHICH THE DAINTIEST FOOT OF FRANCE AND OF NAVARRE FINDS THAT CINDERELLA'S SLIPPER DOES NOT FIT IT AS WELL AS SEVEN-LEAGUE BOOTS.

Here we are obliged to double in our tracks, as Jean Oullier would say in hunting parlance, and ask our reader's permission to retrograde a few hours, and follow the Comte de Bonneville and Petit-Pierre, who, as we have probably made it clear, are not the least important personages of our history.

The general's suppositions were perfectly correct. When the fleeing party left the subterranean passage, the Vendéan gentlemen crossed the ruins, entered the covered way, and there deliberated for a few moments on the proper course to pursue. The one whose identity was concealed under the name of Gaspard[2] thought it advisable to move cautiously. Bonneville's excitement when Michel announced the approach of the column had not escaped him; he heard an exclamation the count could not restrain,--"We must put Petit-Pierre in safety!" Consequently, he watched during their flight (as well as the feeble gleam of the torches would allow) the features of the little peasant, the result being that his manners became not only reserved but profoundly respectful.

"You said, monsieur," he now exclaimed, addressing the Comte de Bonneville, "that the safety of the person who accompanies you was to be considered before our own, being of the utmost importance to the cause we are resolved to sustain. Ought we not therefore to remain as a bodyguard to that person, so that if any danger threatens him,--and we are likely now to meet danger everywhere,--we may be at hand to make a rampart of our bodies for him."

"You would be right no doubt, monsieur, if the question were one of fighting," said the Comte de Bonneville. "But just now our object is flight, and for that the fewer we are in number, the easier and more certain our escape."

"Remember, count," said Gaspard, frowning, "that you take upon yourself at twenty-two years of age the responsibility of a very precious treasure."

"My devotion has already been judged, monsieur," replied the count, haughtily. "I shall endeavor to be worthy of the confidence with which I am honored."

Petit-Pierre, who had hitherto held his place silently in the midst of the little group, now thought the time had come to interfere.

"Come, come," he said; "the safety of a poor little peasant must not be made an apple of discord between the noblest champions of the cause you mention. I see it is necessary that I should say a word; we have no time to lose in useless discussion. But I wish, in the first place, my friends," said Petit-Pierre, in a tone of grateful affection, "to ask your pardon for the disguise I have thought best to keep up, even with you, for one purpose only, that of hearing your real thoughts, your frank opinions, unaffected by your desire to comply with what is known to be my most ardent desire. Now that Petit-Pierre has gained the information he sought, the regent will take part in your discussions. Meantime, let us separate here; the poorest place is all I need to pass the rest of the night, and Monsieur de Bonneville, who knows the country well, can easily find it for me."

"When may we be admitted to confer with her Royal Highness?" asked Pascal, bowing low before Petit-Pierre.

"As soon as her Royal Highness can find a suitable abode for her wandering majesty, Petit-Pierre will summon you; it will not be long. Remember that Petit-Pierre is firmly resolved never to abandon his friends."

"Petit-Pierre is a gallant lad!" cried Gaspard, gayly, "and his friends will prove, I hope, that they are worthy of him."

"Farewell, then," said Petit-Pierre. "Now that the mask is off, I thank you heartily, my gallant Gaspard, for not being deceived by it. Come, it is time to shake hands and part."

Each gentleman, in turn, took the hand that Petit-Pierre held out to him and kissed it respectfully. Then they all separated on their different ways, some to the right, others to the left, and soon disappeared from sight. Bonneville and Petit-Pierre were left alone.

"Well, what shall we do?" said the latter.

"Follow a direction diametrically opposed to those gentlemen."

"Forward, then, without losing another minute," cried Petit-Pierre, running toward the road.

"Oh! wait, wait a moment!" cried Bonneville. "Not in that way, if you please. Your Highness must--"

"Bonneville," said Petit-Pierre, "don't forget our agreement."

"True; Madame must please excuse--"

"Again! why, you are incorrigible!"

"I was about to say that Petit-Pierre must allow me to take him on my back."

"Very good; here's a great stone that seems planted here for the very purpose. Come nearer, count; come nearer."

Petit-Pierre was already on the stone as he spoke. The young count approached, and Petit-Pierre mounted astride his shoulders.

"You take to it famously," said Bonneville, starting.

"Parbleu!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre. "Saddle-my-nag was a fashionable game when I was young; I have often played at it."

"A good education, you see, is never wasted," said Bonneville, laughing.

"Count," said Petit-Pierre, "it isn't forbidden to speak, is it?"

"On the contrary."

"Well, then, as you are an old Chouan, and I am only beginning my apprenticeship

at Chouannerie, do tell me why I am perched on your shoulders."

"What an inquisitive little person is Petit-Pierre!" said Bonneville.

"No; for I did as you requested, instantly, without discussion, though the position is a rather questionable one, you must admit, for a princess of the House of Bourbon."

"A princess of the House of Bourbon! Is there any such person here?"

"Ah! true. Well then, please to tell me why Petit-Pierre, who can walk and run and jump ditches, is perched on the shoulders of his friend Bonneville, who can't do any of those things with Petit-Pierre on his back."

"Well, I'll tell you; it is because Petit-Pierre has such a tiny foot."

"Tiny, yes; but firm, too!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre, as if his vanity was ruffled.

"Yes, but firm as it may be, it is too small not to be recognized."

"By whom?"

"By those who are on our traces."

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre, with comic sadness; "who would ever have told me that some day, or some night, I should regret that my foot was not as large as that of Madame la Duchesse de ----"

"Poor Marquis de Souday, who was so fluttered by what you told him of your court acquaintances," said Bonneville, laughing, "what would he think now if he heard you talking with such assurance and experience of the feet of duchesses?"

"He would set it down to my rôle of page." Then after a moment's silence, "I understand very well that you should want them to lose my tracks; but you know we can't travel long in this way. Saint Christopher himself would get tired; and, sooner or later, that wretched little foot will leave its imprint on a patch of mud."

"We'll baffle the hounds for a short time, at any rate."

The young man bore to the left, attracted by the sound of a brook.

"What are you about?" asked Petit-Pierre. "You will lose the path; you are knee-deep in water now."

"Of course I am," said Bonneville, hoisting Petit-Pierre a little higher on his shoulders; "and now let thou look for our traces!" he cried, hurrying up the bed of the brook.

"Ha, ha! that is clever of you!" cried Petit-Pierre. "You have missed your vocation, Bonneville; you ought to have been born in a primeval forest, or on the pampas of South America. The fact is that, to follow us, a trail is needed, and here there is none."

"Don't laugh. The man who is after us is an old hand at such pursuits; he fought in La Vendée in the days when Charette, almost single-handed, gave the Blues a terrible piece of work to do."

"Well, so much the better," cried Petit-Pierre, gayly; "better far to fight with those who are worth the trouble."

But in spite of the confidence he thus expressed, Petit-Pierre, after uttering the words, grew thoughtful, while Bonneville struggled bravely against the rolling stones and fallen branches which impeded him greatly, for he still followed the course of the brook.

After another quarter of an hour of such advance the brook fell into a second and a wider stream, which was really the one that circles at the base of the Viette des Biques. Here the water came to Bonneville's waist, and presently, to his great regret, he was forced to land and continue his way along one or the other bank of the little stream.

But the fugitives had only gone from Scylla to Charybdis, for the shores of the mountain-torrent, bristling with thorns, interlaced with trunks and roots of fallen trees, soon became impassable.

Bonneville placed Petit-Pierre on the ground, finding it impossible to carry him

further, and struck boldly into the thicket, requesting Petit-Pierre to follow closely through the opening made by his body; and thus, in spite of all obstacles, in spite too of the darkness of the night and the deeper darkness of the woods, he advanced in a straight line, as none but those who have constant experience in forests can succeed in doing.

The plan succeeded well, for after going some fifty yards they struck one of those paths called "lines," which are cut parallel to each other through forests, partly to mark the limits of felling, and partly to facilitate the transportation of the wood.

"Oh, what a good find!" said Petit-Pierre, who found it hard to walk through the tangle of underbrush and briers which rose at times above his head. "Here, at least, we can stretch our legs."

"Yes, and without leaving tracks," replied Bonneville, striking the ground, which was hard and rocky.

"Now all we want to know is which way to go," said Petit-Pierre.

"As we have, I believe, thrown those who are after us off the scent, we can now go whichever way you think best," replied Bonneville.

"You know that to-morrow night I have a rendezvous at La Cloutière with our friends from Paris."

"We can get to La Cloutière from here almost without leaving the woods, where we are safer than we should be in the open. We can take a path I know of to the forest of Touvois and the Grandes-Landes, to the west of which is La Cloutière; only, it is impossible for us to get there to-day."

"Why not?"

"Because we should have to make a number of detours, which would take us at least six hours; and that is very much more than you have strength for."

Petit-Pierre stamped his foot impatiently.

"I know a farmhouse," continued Bonneville, "about three miles this side of La Benaste, where we should be welcome, and where you could rest awhile before doing the remainder of the way."

"Very good," said Petit-Pierre; "then let us start at once. Which way?"

"Let me precede you," said Bonneville. "We must go to the right."

Bonneville took the direction he named, and stalked on with the persistency he had shown on leaving the banks of the stream. Petit-Pierre followed him.

From time to time the Comte de Bonneville stopped to reconnoitre the way and give his companion time to breathe. He warned him of the various obstacles in the path before they came to them, with a minuteness which showed how thoroughly familiar he was with the forest of Machecoul.

"You see I am avoiding the paths," he said to his companion, during one of their halts.

"Yes; and why do you do so?"

"Because they will be certain to look for us in the paths where the ground is soft; whereas here, where there has not been so much trampling, our steps are less likely to be observed."

"But perhaps this way is the longer."

"Yes, but safer."

They walked on for ten minutes in silence, when Bonneville stopped and caught his companion by the arm. The latter asked what the trouble was.

"Hush! or speak very low," said Bonneville.

"Why?"

"Don't you hear anything?"

"No."

"I hear voices."

"Where?"

"There, about five hundred yards in that direction. I fancy I can distinguish through the branches a ruddy gleam of light."

"Yes, and so can I."

"What do you suppose it is?"

"I ask you that."

"The devil!"

"Can it be charcoal-burners?"

"No; this is not the time of year when they start their kilns. And if they were charcoal-burners, I should not like to trust them; I have no right, being your guide, to run any risks."

"Is there any other road we could take?"

"Yes."

"Then suppose we try it."

"I don't want to take it till reduced to the last extremity."

"Why not?"

"Because it crosses a marsh."

"Pooh! you who can walk on the water like Saint Peter! Don't you know the marsh?"

"I know it very well. I have often shot snipe there; but--"

"But?"

"It was by daylight."

"And this marsh--"

"Is a bog where, even in the daytime, I have come near sinking."

"Then let us risk an encounter with these worthy people. I should not be sorry to warm myself at their fire."

"Stay here; and let me go and reconnoitre."

"But--"

"Don't be afraid."

So saying, Bonneville disappeared noiselessly in the darkness.

XXXIX.

PETIT-PIERRE MAKES THE BEST MEAL HE EVER MADE IN HIS LIFE.

Petit-Pierre, left alone, leaned against a tree, and there, silent, motionless, with fixed eyes and straining ears, he waited, striving to catch every sound as it passed him. For five minutes he heard nothing except a sort of hum which came from the direction of the lights.

Suddenly the neighing of a horse echoed through the forest. Petit-Pierre trembled. Almost at the same moment a light sound came from the bushes, and a shadow rose before him; it was Bonneville.

Bonneville, who did not see Petit-Pierre leaning against the trunk of a tree, called him twice gently. Petit-Pierre bounded toward him.

"Quick! quick!" said Bonneville, dragging Petit-Pierre away.

"What is it?"

"Not an instant to lose! Come! come!"

Then, as he ran, he said:--

"A camp of soldiers. If there were men only I might have warmed myself at their fire without their seeing or hearing me; but a horse smelt me out and neighed."

"I heard it."

"Then you understand; not a word. We must take to our legs, that's all."

As he spoke they were running along a wood-road, which fortunately came in their way. After a time Bonneville drew Petit-Pierre into the bushes.

"Get your breath," he said.

While Petit-Pierre rested, Bonneville tried to make out where they were.

"Are we lost?" asked Petit-Pierre, uneasily.

"Oh, no danger of that!" said Bonneville. "I'm only looking for a way to avoid that horrid marsh."

"If it leads us straight to our object we had better take it," said Petit-Pierre.

"We must," replied Bonneville; "I don't see any other way."

"Forward, then!" cried Petit-Pierre; "only, you must guide me."

Bonneville made no answer; but in proof of urgency, he started at once, and instead of following the "line" path on which they were, he turned to the right and plunged into the thicket. At the end of ten minutes' march the underbrush lessened. They were nearing the edge of the forest, and they could hear before them the swishing of the reeds in the wind.

"Aha!" cried Petit-Pierre, recognizing the sound; "we are close to the marsh now."

"Yes," said Bonneville; "and I ought not to conceal from you that this is the most critical moment of our flight."

So saying, the young man took from his pocket a knife, which might, if necessary, be used as a dagger, and cut down a sapling, removing all the branches, but taking care to hide each one as he lopped it off.

"Now," he said, "my poor Petit-Pierre, you must resign yourself and go back to your former place on my shoulders."

Petit-Pierre instantly did as he was told, and Bonneville went forward toward the marsh. His advance under the weight he carried, hindered by the long sapling which he used to test the condition of the ground at every step, was horribly difficult. Often

he sank into the slough almost to his knees, and the earth, which seemed soft enough as it gave way under him, offered a positive resistance when he sought to extricate himself. It was, in fact, with the utmost difficulty that he could get his legs out of it; it seemed as though the gulf that opened at their feet was unwilling to relinquish its prey.

"Let me give you some advice, my dear count," said Petit-Pierre.

Bonneville stopped and wiped his brow.

"If, instead of paddling in this mire, you stepped from tuft to tuft of those reeds which are growing here, I think you would find a better foothold."

"Yes," said Bonneville, "I should; but we should leave more visible traces." Then, a moment later, he added, "No matter. You are right; it is best."

And changing his direction a little, Bonneville took to the reeds. The matted roots of the water-plants had, in fact, made little islets of a foot or more in circumference, which gave a fairly good foothold over the boggy ground. The young man felt them, one after the other, with the end of his stick and stepped from each to each.

Nevertheless, he slipped constantly. Burdened with Petit-Pierre's weight, he had great difficulty in recovering himself; and before long this toilsome struggle so completely exhausted him he was forced to ask Petit-Pierre to get down and let him rest awhile.

"You are worn out, my poor Bonneville," said Petit-Pierre. "Is it very much farther, this marsh of yours?"

"Two or three hundred yards more, and then we re-enter the forest as far as the line-path to Benaste, which will take us direct to the farm."

"Can you go as far as that?"

"I hope so."

"Good God! how I wish I could carry you myself, or at any rate, walk beside you."

These words restored the count's courage. Giving up his second method of advancing from tuft to tuft, he plunged resolutely into the mire. But the more he advanced, the more the slough appeared to move and deepen. Suddenly Bonneville, who had made a mistake and placed his foot on a spot he had not had time to sound, felt himself sinking rapidly and likely to disappear.

"If I sink altogether," he said, "fling yourself either to right or left. These dangerous places are never very wide."

Petit-Pierre sprang off at once, not to save himself, but to lighten Bonneville of the additional weight.

"Oh, my friend!" he cried, with an aching heart and eyes wet with tears as he listened to that generous cry of devotion and self-forgetfulness, "think only of yourself, I command you."

The young count had already sunk to the waist. Fortunately, he had time to put his sapling across the bog before him; and as each end rested on a tuft of reeds sufficiently strong to bear a weight, he was able, thanks to the support they gave, and aided by Petit-Pierre, who held him by the collar of his coat, to extricate himself from the dangerous place.

Soon the ground became more solid; the black line of the woods which had all along marked the horizon came nearer and increased in height. The fugitives were evidently approaching the end of the bog.

"At last!" cried Bonneville.

"Ouf!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre, slipping off Bonneville's shoulders as soon as he felt that the earth was solid beneath their feet. "Ouf! you must be worn out, my dear count."

"Out of breath, that's all," replied Bonneville.

"Good heavens!" cried Petit-Pierre; "to think that I should have nothing to give

you,--not even the flask of a soldier or pilgrim, or the crust of a beggar's loaf!"

"Pooh!" said the count; "my strength doesn't come from my stomach."

"Tell me where it does come from, my dear count, and I will try to be as strong as you."

"Are you hungry?"

"I'll admit that I could eat something."

"Alas!" said the count; "you make me regret now what I cared little for a moment ago."

Petit-Pierre laughed; and then, for the purpose of keeping up his companion's heart, he cried out gayly:--

"Bonneville, call the usher and let him notify the chamberlain on duty to order the stewards to bring my lunch-basket. I would like one of those snipe I hear whistling about us."

"Her Royal Highness is served," said the count, kneeling on one knee, and offering on the top of his hat an object which Petit-Pierre seized eagerly.

"Bread!" he cried.

"Black bread," said Bonneville.

"Oh, no matter! I can't see the color at night."

"Dry bread! doubly dry!"

"But it is bread, at any rate."

And Petit-Pierre set his handsome teeth into the crust, which had been drying in the count's pocket for the last two days.

"And when I think," said Petit-Pierre, "that General Dermoncourt is probably at this moment eating my supper at Souday, isn't it aggravating?" Then, suddenly, "Oh! forgive me, my dear guide," he went on, "but my stomach got the better of my heart;

I forgot to offer you half my supper."

"Thanks," replied Bonneville; "but my appetite isn't strong enough yet to munch stones. In return for your gracious offer, I'll show you how to make your poor supper less husky."

Bonneville took the bread, broke it, not without difficulty, into little bits, soaked it in a brook that was flowing quite near them, called Petit-Pierre, sat down himself on one side the brook, while Petit-Pierre sat on the other, and taking out one by one the softened crusts, presented them to his famished companion.

"Upon my honor!" said the latter, when he came to the last crumb, "I haven't eaten such a good supper for twenty years. Bonneville, I appoint you steward of my household."

"Meantime," said the count, "I am your guide. Come, luxury enough; we must continue our way."

"I'm ready," said Petit-Pierre, springing gayly to his feet.

Again they started through the woods, and half an hour's walking brought them to a river which they were forced to cross. Bonneville tried his usual method; but at the first step, the water came to his waist, at the second to his shoulders. Feeling himself dragged by the current he caught at the branch of a tree and returned to the bank.

It was necessary to find a way to cross. At a distance of about three hundred yards Bonneville thought he had found one; but it was nothing more than the trunk of a tree lately blown down by the wind, and still bearing all its branches.

"Do you think you can walk over that?" he asked Petit-Pierre.

"If you can, I can," replied the latter.

"Hold on to the branches, and don't have any conceit about your powers; don't raise one foot till you are quite sure the other is firm," said Bonneville, climbing first on to the trunk of the tree.

"I'm to follow, I suppose?"

"Wait till I can give you a hand."

"Here I am! Goodness! what a number of things one ought to know in order to roam the wilds; I never should have thought it."

"Don't talk, for God's sake! pay attention to your feet. One moment! Stop where you are; don't move. Here's a branch you can't get by; I'll cut it."

Just as he stooped to do as he said, the count heard a smothered cry behind him and the fall of a body into the water. He looked back. Petit-Pierre had disappeared.

Without losing a second, Bonneville dropped into the same place; and his luck served him well, for going to the bottom of the river, which was not more than eight feet deep at this place, his hand came in contact with Petit-Pierre's leg.

He seized it, trembling with emotion, and paying no heed to the uncomfortable position in which he held the body he struck out for the bank of the stream, which was, happily, as narrow as it was deep. Petit-Pierre made no movement. Bonneville took him in his arms and laid him on the dry leaves, calling, entreating, even shaking him.

Petit-Pierre continued silent and motionless. The count tore his hair in his anguish.

"Oh, it is my fault! my fault!" he cried. "O God, you have punished my pride! I counted too much on myself; I thought I could save her. Oh, my life,--take my life, God! for one sigh, one breath--"

The cool night air did more to bring Petit-Pierre to life than all Bonneville's lamentations; at the end of a few minutes he opened his eyes and sneezed.

Bonneville, who, in his paroxysm of grief, swore not to survive the being whose death he thought he had caused, gave a cry of joy and fell on his knees by Petit-Pierre, who was now sufficiently recovered to understand his last words.

"Bonneville," said Petit-Pierre, "you didn't say 'God bless you!' when I sneezed, and

now I shall have a cold in my head."

"Living! living! living!" cried Bonneville, as exuberant in his joy as he was in his grief.

"Yes, living enough, thanks to you. If you were any other than you are, I would swear to you never to forget it."

"You are soaked!"

"Yes, my shoes especially, Bonneville. The water keeps running down, running down in a most disagreeable manner."

"And no fire! no means to make one!"

"Pooh! we shall get warm in walking. I speak in the plural, for you must be as wet as I am; in fact, it's your third bath,--one was of mud."

"Oh, don't think of me! Can you walk?"

"I believe so, as soon as I empty my shoes."

Bonneville helped Petit-Pierre to get rid of the water which filled her shoes. Then he took off his own thick jacket, and having wrung the water from it, he put it over her shoulders, saying:--

"Now for Benaste, and fast, too!"

"Ha! Bonneville," exclaimed Petit-Pierre; "a fine gain we have made by trying to avoid that camp-fire which would be everything to us just now!"

"We can't go back and deliver ourselves up," said Bonneville, with a look of despair.

"Nonsense! don't take my little joke as a reproach. What an ill-regulated mind you have! Come, let us march, march! Now that I use my legs I feel I am drying up; in ten minutes I shall begin to perspire."

There was no need to hasten Bonneville. He advanced so rapidly that Petit-Pierre could barely keep up with him; and from time to time she was forced to remind him that her legs were not as long as his.

But Bonneville could not recover from the shock of emotion caused by the accident to his young companion, and he now completely lost his head on discovering that, among these bushes he once knew so well, he had missed his way. A dozen times he had stopped as he entered a "line" path and looked about him, and each time, after shaking his head, he plunged onward in a sort of frenzy.

At last Petit-Pierre, who could scarcely keep up with him, except by running, said, as she noticed his increasing agitation:--

"Tell me what is the matter, dear count."

"The matter is that I am a wretched man," said Bonneville. "I relied too much on my knowledge of these localities, and--and--"

"We have lost our way?"

"I fear so."

"And I am sure of it. See, here is a branch I remember breaking when we passed here just now; we are turning in a circle. You see how I profit by your lessons, Bonneville," added Petit-Pierre, triumphantly.

"Ah!" said Bonneville; "I see what set me wrong."

"What was it?"

"When we left the water I landed on the side we had just left, and in my agitation at your accident, I did not notice the mistake."

"So that our plunge bath was absolutely useless!" cried Petit-Pierre, laughing heartily.

"Oh! for God's sake, Madame, don't laugh like that; your gayety cuts me to the heart."

"Well, it warms me."

"Then you are cold?"

"A little; but that's not the worst."

"What is worse?"

"Why, for half an hour you have not dared to tell me we are lost, and for half an hour I've not dared to tell you that my legs seem to be giving way and refusing to do their duty."

"Then what is to become of us?"

"Well, well! am I to play your part as man and give you courage? So be it. The council is open; what is your opinion?"

"That we cannot reach Benaste to-night."

"Next?"

"That we must try to get to the nearest farmhouse before daylight."

"Very good," said Petit-Pierre. "Have you any idea of where we are?"

"No stars in the sky, no moon--"

"And no compass," added Petit-Pierre, laughing, and trying by a joke to revive her companion's nerve.

"Wait."

"Ah! you have an idea, I'm sure!"

"I happened to notice the vane on the castle just at dusk; the wind was east."

Bonneville wet his finger in his mouth and held it up.

"What's that for?"

"A weathercock. There's the north," he said, unhesitatingly; "if we walk in the teeth of the wind we shall come out on the plain near Saint-Philbert."

"Yes, by walking; but that's the difficulty."

"Will you let me carry you in my arms?"

"You have enough to carry in yourself, my poor Bonneville."

The duchess rose with an effort, for during the last few moments she had seated

herself, or rather let herself drop, at the foot of a tree.

"There!" she said; "now I am on my feet, and I mean that these rebellious legs shall carry me. I will conquer them as I would all rebels; that's what I'm here for."

And the brave woman made four or five steps; but her fatigue was so great, her limbs so stiffened by the icy bath she had taken, that she staggered and came near falling. Bonneville sprang to support her.

"Heart of God!" she cried; "let me alone, Monsieur de Bonneville. I will put this miserable body that God has made so frail and delicate on the level of the soul it covers. Don't give it any help, count; don't support it. Ha! you stagger, do you? ha! you are giving way? Well, if you won't march at the common step you shall be made to charge, and we'll see if in a week you are not as submissive to my will as a beast of burden."

So saying, and joining the action to the word, Petit-Pierre started forward at such a pace that her guide had some difficulty in overtaking her. But the last effort exhausted her; and when Bonneville did rejoin her, she was once more seated, with her face hidden in her two hands. Petit-Pierre was weeping,--weeping with anger rather than pain.

"O God!" she muttered; "you have set me the task of a giant, but you have given me only the strength of a woman."

Willing or not, Bonneville took Petit-Pierre in his arms and hurried along. The words that Gaspard had said to him as they left the vaults rang in his ears. He felt that so delicate a body could not bear up any longer under these violent shocks, and he resolved to spend his last strength in putting the treasure confided to him in a place of safety. He knew now that a few moments wasted might mean death to his companion.

For over fifteen minutes the brave man kept on rapidly. His hat fell off, but no longer caring for the trail he left behind him, the count did not stop to pick it up. He

felt the body of the duchess shuddering with cold in his arms, he heard her teeth chattering; and the sound spurred him as the applause of a crowd spurs a race-horse, and gave him superhuman energy.

But, little by little, this fictitious strength gave way. Bonneville's legs would only obey him mechanically; the blood seemed to settle on his chest and choked him. He felt his heart swell; he could not breathe; his breath rattled; a cold sweat poured from his brow; his arteries throbbed as if his head must burst. From time to time a thick cloud covered his eyes, marbled with flame. Soon he staggered at every slope, stumbled at every stone; his failing knees, powerless to straighten themselves, could only go forward by a mighty effort.

"Stop! stop! Monsieur de Bonneville," cried Petit-Pierre; "stop, I command you!"

"No, I will not stop," replied Bonneville. "I have still some strength, thank God! and I shall use it to the end. Stop? stop? when we are almost into port? when at the cost of a little further effort I shall put you in safety? There! see that; look there!"

And as he spoke they saw at the end of the path they were following a broad band of ruddy light which rose above the horizon; and on that glow a black and angular shape stood out distinctly, indicating a house. Day was dawning. They had now reached the end of the wood and were at the edge of fields.

But just as Bonneville gave that cry of joy, his legs bent under him; he fell to his knees. Then, with a last supreme effort, he cast himself gently backward as if at the moment when his consciousness left him he meant to spare his precious burden from the dangers of a fall. Petit-Pierre released herself from his grasp and stood at his feet, but so feebly that she seemed scarcely stronger than her companion. She tried to raise the count, but could not do it. Bonneville, for his part, put his hands to his mouth,--no doubt to give the owl's cry of the Chouans; but his breath failed him, and he scarcely uttered the words, "Don't forget--" before he fainted entirely.

The house they had seen was not more than seven or eight hundred steps from the

place where Bonneville had fallen. Petit-Pierre determined to go there and ask at all risks for assistance to her friend. Making a supreme effort she started in that direction. Just as she passed a crossway Petit-Pierre saw a man on one of the paths that led to it. She called to him, but he did not turn his head.

Then Petit-Pierre, either by a sudden inspiration or because she gave that meaning to Bonneville's last words, utilized a lesson the count had taught her. Putting her hands to her mouth she uttered, as best she could, the cry of the screech-owl.

The man stopped instantly, turned back, and came to Petit-Pierre.

"My friend," she cried, as soon as he came within reach of her voice, "if you need gold, I will give it to you; but, for God's sake, come and help me save an unfortunate man who is dying."

Then, with all her remaining strength, and seeing that the man was following her, Petit-Pierre hurried back to Bonneville and raised his head by an effort. The count was still unconscious.

As soon as the new-comer reached them and glanced at the prostrate man, he said:--

"You need not offer me gold to induce me to help Monsieur le Comte de Bonneville."

Petit-Pierre looked at the man attentively.

"Jean Oullier!" she cried, recognizing the Marquis de Souday's keeper in the dawning light,--"Jean Oullier, can you find a safe refuge for my friend and for me close by?"

"There is no house but this within a mile or two," he said.

He spoke of it with repugnance, but Petit-Pierre either did not or would not notice the tone.

"You must guide me and carry him."

"Down there?" cried Jean Oullier.

"Yes; are not they royalists?--the persons who live in that house, I mean."

"I don't know yet," said Jean Oullier.

"Go on; I put our lives in your hands, Jean Oullier, and I know that you deserve my utmost confidence."

Jean Oullier took Bonneville, still unconscious, on his shoulders, and led Petit-Pierre by the hand. He walked toward the house, which was that belonging to Joseph Picaut and his sister-in-law, the widow of Pascal.

Jean Oullier mounted the hedge-bank as easily as though he were only carrying a game-bag, instead of the body of a man. Once in the orchard, however, he advanced cautiously. Every one was still sleeping in Joseph's part of the house; but it was not so in the widow's room. In the gleam from the windows a shadow could be seen passing to and fro behind the curtains.

Jean Oullier seemed now to decide between two courses.

"Faith! weighing one against the other," he muttered to himself, "I like it as well this way."

And he walked resolutely to that part of the house which belonged to Pascal. When he reached the door he opened it. Pascal's body lay on the bed. The widow had lighted two candles, and was praying beside the dead. Hearing the door open, she rose and turned round.

"Widow Pascal," said Jean Oullier, without releasing his burden or the hand of Petit-Pierre, "I saved your life to-night at the Viette des Biques."

Marianne looked at him in astonishment, as if trying to recall her recollections.

"Don't you believe me?"

"Yes, Jean Oullier, I believe you; I know you are not a man to tell a lie, were it even to save your life. Besides, I heard the shot and I suspected whose hand fired it."

"Widow Pascal, will you avenge your husband and make your fortune at one stroke?

I bring you the means."

"How?"

"Here," continued Jean Oullier, "are Madame la Duchesse de Berry and Monsieur le Comte de Bonneville, who might have died, perhaps, of hunger and fatigue, if I had not come, as I have, to ask you to shelter them; here they are."

The widow looked at all three in stupefaction, yet with a visible interest.

"This head, which you see here," continued Jean Oullier, "is worth its weight in gold. You can deliver it up if you so please, and, as I told you, avenge your husband and make your fortune by that act."

"Jean Oullier," replied the widow, in a grave voice, "God commands us to do charity to all, whether great or small. Two unfortunate persons have come to my door; I shall not repulse them. Two exiles ask me to shelter them, and my house shall crumble about my ears before I betray them." Then, with a simple gesture, to which her action gave a splendid grandeur, she added:--

"Enter, Jean Oullier; enter fearlessly,--you, and those who are with you."

They entered. While Petit Pierre was helping Jean Oullier to place the count in a chair, the old keeper said to her in a low voice:--

"Madame, put back your own fair hair behind your wig; it made me guess the truth I have told this woman, but others ought not to see it."

XL.

EQUALITY IN DEATH.

The same day, about two in the afternoon, Courtin left La Logerie to go to Machecoul under pretence of buying a draught-ox, but in reality to get news of the events of the night,--events in which the municipal functionary had a special interest, as our readers will fully understand.

When he reached the ford at Pont-Farcy, he found some men lifting the body of Tinguy's son, and around them several women and children, who were gazing at the dead body with the curiosity natural to their sex and years. When the mayor of La Logerie, stimulating his pony by a stick with a leathern thong, which he carried in his hand, made it enter the river, all eyes were turned upon him, and the conversation ceased as if by magic, though up to that moment it had been very eager and animated.

"Well, what's going on, gars?" asked Courtin, making his animal cross the river diagonally so as to reach land precisely opposite to the group.

"A death," replied one of the men, with the laconic brevity of a Vendéan peasant.

Courtin looked at the corpse and saw that it wore a uniform.

"Luckily," he said, "it isn't any one who belongs about here."

"You're mistaken. Monsieur Courtin," replied the gloomy voice of a man in a brown jacket.

The title of monsieur thus given to him, and given, too, with a certain emphasis, was in no wise flattering to the farmer of La Logerie. Under the circumstances and in the phase of public feeling La Vendée had just entered, he knew that this title of monsieur, in the mouth of a peasant, when it was not given as a testimony of respect, meant either an insult or a threat,--two things which affected Courtin quite differently.

In short, the mayor of La Logerie did himself the justice not to take the title thus bestowed upon him as a mark of consideration, and he therefore resolved to be prudent.

"And yet I think," he said, in a mild and gentle voice, "that he wears a chasseur's uniform."

"Pooh! uniform!" retorted the same peasant; "as if you didn't know that the

man-hunt" (this was the name the Vendéan peasantry gave to the conscription) "doesn't respect our sons and brothers more than it does those of others. It seems to me you ought to know that, mayor as you are."

Again there was silence,--a silence so oppressive to Courtin that he once more interrupted it. "Does any one know the name of the poor gars who has perished so unfortunately?" he asked, making immense but fruitless efforts to force a tear to his eye.

No one answered. The silence became more and more significant.

"Does any one know if there were other victims? Was any one killed among our own gars? I hear a number of shots were fired."

"As for other victims," said the same peasant, "I know as yet of only one,--this one here; though perhaps it is a sin to talk of such victims beside a Christian corpse."

As he spoke the peasant turned aside and, fixing his eyes on Courtin, he pointed with his finger to the body of Jean Oullier's dog, lying on the bank, partly in the water which flowed over it. Maître Courtin turned pale; he coughed, as if an invisible hand had clutched his throat.

"What's that?" he said; "a dog? Ha! if we had only to mourn for that kind of victim our tears would be few."

"Nay, nay," said the man in the brown jacket; "the blood of a dog must be paid for, Maître Courtin, like everything else. I'm certain that the master of poor Pataud won't forget the man who shot his dog, coming out of Montaigu, with leaden wolf-balls, three of which entered his body."

As he finished speaking the man, apparently thinking he had exchanged words enough with Courtin, did not wait for any answer, but turned on his heel, passed up a bank, and disappeared behind its hedge. As for the other men, they resumed their march with the body. The women and children followed behind tumultuously, praying aloud. Courtin was left alone.

"Bah!" he said to himself, jabbing his pony with his one spur; "before I pay for what Jean Oullier lays to my account, he'll have to escape the clutches which, thanks to me, are on him at this moment,--it won't be easy, though, of course, it is possible."

Maître Courtin continued his way; but his curiosity was greater than ever, and he felt he could not wait till the amble of his steed took him to Machecoul before satisfying it.

He happened at this moment to be passing the cross of La Bertaudière, near which the road leading to the house of the Picauts joined the main road. He thought of Pascal, who could tell him the news better than any one, as he had sent him to guide the troops the night before.

"What a jackass I am!" he cried, speaking to himself. "It will only take me half an hour out of my way, and I can hear the truth from a mouth that won't lie to me. I'll go to Pascal; he'll tell me the result of the trick."

Maître Courtin turned, therefore, to the right; and five minutes later he crossed the little orchard and made his entrance over a heap of manure into the courtyard of Pascal's dwelling.

Joseph, sitting on a horse-collar, was smoking his pipe before the door of his half of the house. Seeing who his visitor was he did not think it worth while to disturb himself. Courtin, who had an admirably keen faculty for seeing all without appearing to notice anything, fastened his pony to one of the iron rings that were screwed into the wall. Then, turning to Joseph, he said:--

"Is your brother at home?"

"Yes, he is still there," replied Picaut, dwelling on the word still in a manner that seemed a little strange to the mayor of La Logerie; "do you want him again to-day to guide the red-breeches to Souday?"

Courtin bit his lips and made no reply to Joseph, while to himself he said, as he knocked at the door of the other Picaut:--

"How came that fool of a Pascal to tell his rascally brother it was I who sent him on that errand? Upon my soul, one can't do anything in these parts without everybody gabbling about it within twenty-four hours!"

Courtin's monologue hindered him from noticing that his knock was not immediately answered, and that the door, contrary to the trustful habits of the peasantry, was bolted.

At last, however, the door opened, and when Courtin's eyes fell upon the scene before him he was so unprepared for what he saw that he actually recoiled from the threshold.

"Who is dead here?" he asked.

"Look!" replied the widow, without leaving her seat in the chimney-corner, which she had resumed after opening the door.

Courtin turned his eyes again to the bed, and though he could see beneath the sheet only the outline of a man's form, he guessed the truth.

"Pascal!" he cried; "is it Pascal?"

"I thought you knew it," said the widow.

"I?"

"Yes, you,--you, who are the chief cause of his death."

"I?--I?" replied Courtin, remembering what Joseph had just said to him, and feeling it all-important for his own safety to deny his share in the matter. "I swear to you, on the word of an honest man, that I have not seen your husband for over a week."

"Don't swear," replied the widow. "Pascal never swore; neither did he lie."

"But who told you that I had seen him?" persisted Courtin. "It is too bad to blame me for nothing!"

"Don't lie in presence of the dead, Monsieur Courtin," said Marianne; "it will bring down evil upon you."

"I am not lying," stammered the man.

"Pascal left this house to meet you; you engaged him as guide for the soldiers."

Courtin made a movement of denial.

"Oh! I don't blame you for that," continued the widow, looking at a peasant-girl, about twenty-five to thirty years of age, who was winding her distaff in the opposite corner of the fireplace; "it was his duty to give assistance to those who want to prevent our country from being torn by civil war."

"That's my object, my sole object," replied Courtin, lowering his voice, so that the young peasant-woman hardly heard him. "I wish the government would rid us once for all of these fomenters of trouble,--these nobles who crush us with their wealth in peace, and massacre us when it comes to war. I am doing my best for this end, Mistress Picaut; but I daren't boast of it, you see, because you never know what the people about here may do to you."

"Why should you complain if they strike you from behind, when you hide yourself in striking them?" said Marianne, with a look of the deepest contempt.

"Damn it! one does as one dares, Mistress Picaut," replied Courtin, with some embarrassment. "It is not given to all the world to be brave and bold like your poor husband. But we'll revenge him, that good Pascal! we'll revenge him. I swear it to you!"

"Thank you; but I don't want you to meddle in that, Monsieur Courtin," said the widow, in a voice that seemed almost threatening, so hard and bitter was it. "You have meddled too much already in the affairs of this poor household. Spend your good offices on others in future."

"As you please, Mistress Picaut. Alas! I loved your good husband so truly that I'll do anything I can to please you." Then, suddenly turning toward the young peasant-woman, whom he had seemed not to notice up to that time, "Who is this young woman?" he said.

"A cousin of mine, who came this morning from Port-Saint-Père, to help me in paying the last duties to my poor Pascal, and to keep me company."

"From Port-Saint-Père this morning! Ha, ha! Mistress Picaut, she must be a good walker, if she did that distance so quickly."

The poor widow, unused to lying, having never in her life had occasion to lie, lied badly. She bit her lips, and gave Courtin an angry look, which, happily, he did not see, being occupied at the moment in a close examination of a peasant's costume which was drying before the fire. The two articles which seemed to attract him most were a pair of shoes and a shirt. The shoes, though iron-nailed and made of common leather, were of a shape not common among cottagers, and the shirt was of the finest linen cambric.

"Soft stuff! soft stuff!" he muttered, rubbing the delicate tissue between his fingers; "it's my opinion it won't scratch the skin of whoever wears it."

The young peasant-woman now thought it time to come to the help of the widow, who seemed on thorns and whose forehead was clouding over in a visibly threatening way.

"Yes," she said; "those are some old clothes I bought of a dealer in Nantes, to make over for my little nephew."

"And you washed them before sewing them? Faith, you're right, my girl! for," added Courtin, looking fixedly at her, "no one knows who has worn the garments of those old-clothes dealers,--it may have been a prince, or it may have been a leper."

"Maître Courtin," interrupted Marianne, who seemed annoyed by the conversation, "your pony is getting restless."

Courtin listened.

"If I didn't hear your brother-in-law walking in the garret overhead I should think he was teasing it, the ill-natured fellow!"

At this new proof of the essentially detective nature of the mayor of La Logerie, the young peasant-woman turned pale; and her paleness increased when she heard Courtin, who rose to look after his pony through the casement, mutter, as if to himself:--

"Why, no; there he is, that fellow! He is tickling my horse with the end of his whip." Then, returning to the widow, he said, "Who have you got up in your garret, mistress?"

The young woman was about to answer that Joseph had a wife and children, and that the garret was common to all; but the widow did not give her time to begin the sentence.

"Maître Courtin," she said, standing up, "are not your questions coming to an end soon? I hate spies, I warn you, whether they are white or red."

"Since when is a friendly talk among friends called spying? Whew! you have grown very suspicious, all of a sudden."

The eyes of the younger woman entreated the widow to be more cautious; but her impetuous hostess could no longer contain herself.

"Among friends! friends, indeed!" she said. "Find your friends among your fellows,--I mean among cowards and traitors; and know, once for all, that the widow of Pascal Picaut is not among them. Go, and leave me to my grief, which you have disturbed too long."

"Yes, yes," said Courtin, with an admirably played good-humor; "my presence must be unpleasant to you. I ought to have thought of that before, and I beg your pardon for not having done so. You are determined to see in me the cause of your husband's death, and that grieves me; oh! it grieves me, Mistress Picaut, for I loved him heartily and wouldn't have harmed him for the world. But, since you feel as you do, and drive me out of your house, I'll go, I'll go; don't take on like that."

Just then the widow, who seemed more and more disturbed, glanced rapidly at the

younger woman and showed her by that glance the bread-box, which stood beside the door. On that box was a pocket-inkstand, which had, no doubt, been used to write the order Jean Oullier had taken in the morning to the Marquis de Souday. This inkstand was of green morocco, and with it lay a sort of tube, containing all that was necessary for writing a letter. As Courtin went to the door he could not fail to see the inkstand and a few scattered papers that lay beside it.

The young woman understood the sign and saw the danger; and before the mayor of La Logerie turned round she had passed, light as a fawn, behind him, and seated herself on the bread-box, so as to hide the unlucky implement completely. Courtin seemed to pay no attention to this man[oe]uvre.

"Well, good-bye to you, Mistress Picaut," he said. "I have lost a comrade in your husband whom I greatly valued; you doubt that, but time will prove it to you."

The widow did not answer; she had said to Courtin all she had to say, and she now seemed to take no notice of him. Motionless, with crossed arms, she was gazing at the corpse, whose rigid form was defined under the sheet that covered it.

"Ho! so you are there, my pretty girl," said Courtin, stopping before the younger woman.

"It was too hot near the fire."

"Take good care of your cousin, my girl," continued Courtin; "this death has made her a wild beast. She is almost as savage as the she-wolves of Machecoul! Well, spin away, my dear; though you may twist your spindle or turn your wheel as best you can, and you'll never weave such fine linen as you've got there in that shirt." Then he left the room and shut the door, muttering, "Fine linen, very fine!"

"Quick! quick! hide all those things!" cried the widow. "He has gone out only to come back."

Quick as thought the young woman pushed the inkstand between the box and the wall; but rapid as the movement was, it was still too late. The upper half of the door

was suddenly opened, and Courtin's head appeared above the lower.

"I've startled you; beg pardon," said Courtin. "I did it from a good motive; I want to know when the funeral takes place."

"To-morrow, I think," said the young woman.

"Will you go away, you villanous rascal!" cried the widow, springing toward him, and brandishing the heavy tongs with which she moved the logs in her great fireplace.

Courtin, thoroughly frightened, withdrew. Mistress Picaut, as Courtin called her, closed the upper shutter violently.

The mayor of La Logerie unfastened his pony, picked up a handful of straw, and cleaned off the saddle, which Joseph, maliciously and out of hatred,--a hatred which he inculcated to his children against the "curs,"--had smeared with cows' dung from pommel to crupper. Then, without complaining or retaliating, as if the accident he had just remedied was a perfectly natural one, he mounted his steed with an indifferent air, and even stopped on his way through the orchard to see if the apples were properly setting, with the eye of a connoisseur. But no sooner had he reached the cross of La Bertaudière and turned his horse into the high-road toward Machecoul than he seized his stick by the thick end, and using the leather thong on one flank, and digging his single spur persistently and furiously into the other flank of his beast, he contrived to make that animal take a gait of which it looked utterly incapable.

"There, he's gone at last!" said the younger peasant-woman, who had watched his movements from the window.

"Yes; but that may be none the better for you, Madame," said the widow.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh! I know what I mean."

"Do you think he has gone to denounce us?"

"He is thought to be capable of it. I know nothing personally, for I don't concern myself in such gossip; but his evil face has always led me to think that even the Whites didn't do him injustice."

"You are right," said the young woman, who began to be uneasy; "his face is one that could never inspire confidence."

"Ah! Madame, why did you not keep Jean Oullier near you?" said the widow. "There's an honest man, and a faithful one."

"I had orders to send to the château de Souday. He is to come back this evening with horses so that we may leave your house as soon as possible, for I know we increase your sorrow and add to your cares."

The widow did not answer. With her face hidden in her hands, she was weeping.

"Poor woman!" murmured the duchess; "your tears fall drop by drop upon my heart, where each leaves a painful furrow. Alas! this is the terrible, the inevitable result of revolutions. It is on the head of those who make them that the curse of all this blood and all these tears must fall."

"May it not rather fall, if God is just, on the heads of those who cause them?" said the widow, in a deep and muffled voice, which made her hearer quiver.

"Do you hate us so bitterly?" asked the latter, sadly.

"Yes, I hate you," said the widow. "How can you expect me to love you?"

"Alas! I understand; yes, your husband's death--"

"No, you do not understand," said Marianne, shaking her head.

The younger woman made a sign as if to say, "Explain yourself."

"No," said the widow, "it is not because the man who for fifteen years has been my all in life will be to-morrow in his bed of earth; it is not because when I was a child I witnessed the massacres of Légé, and saw my dear ones killed beneath your banner,

and felt their blood spattering my face; it is not because for ten whole years those who fought for your ancestors persecuted mine, burned their houses, ravaged their fields,--no, I repeat, it is not for that, nor all that, that I hate you."

"Then why is it?"

"Because it seems to me an impious thing that a family, a race, should claim the place of God, our only master here below,--the master of us all, such as we are, great and small; impious to declare that we are born the slaves of that family, to suppose that a people it has tortured have not the right to turn upon their bed of suffering unless they first obtain permission! You belong to that selfish family; you have come of that tyrant race. It is for that I hate you."

"And yet you have given me shelter; you have laid aside your grief to lavish care not only upon me, but also upon him who accompanies me. You have taken your own clothes to cover me; you have given him the clothes of your poor dead husband, for whom I pray here below, and who, I hope, will pray for me in heaven."

"All that will not hinder me, after you have once left my house, after I have fulfilled my duty of hospitality,--all that will not prevent me from praying ardently that those who are pursuing you may capture you."

"Then why not deliver me up to them, if such are really your feelings?"

"Because those feelings are less powerful than my respect for misfortune, my reverence for an oath, my worship of hospitality; because I have sworn that you shall be saved this day; and also because, perhaps, I hope that what you have seen here may be a lesson not wholly lost upon you,--a lesson that may disgust you with your projects. For you are humane; you are good. I see it!"

"What should make me renounce projects for which I have lived these eighteen months?"

"This!" said the widow.

And with a rapid, sudden movement, like all she made, she pulled away the sheet that covered the dead, disclosing the livid face and the ghastly wound surrounded by purple blotches.

The younger woman turned aside. In spite of her firmness, of which she had given so many proofs, she could not bear that dreadful sight.

"Reflect, Madame," continued the widow; "reflect that before what you are attempting can be accomplished, many and many a poor man, whose only crime is to have loved you well,--many fathers, many sons, many brothers,--will be, like this one, lying dead. Reflect that many widows, many sisters, many orphans will be weeping and mourning, as I do, for him who was all their love and all their stay!"

"My God! my God!" exclaimed the princess, bursting into tears, as she fell on her knees and raised her arms to heaven; "if we are mistaken,--if we must render an account to thee for all these hearts we are about to break--"

Her voice, drowned in tears, died away in a moan.

XLI.

THE SEARCH.

A knock was heard on the trap-door leading to the garret.

"What is the matter?" cried Bonneville's voice.

He had heard a few words of what had passed, and became uneasy.

"Nothing, nothing," said the young woman, pressing the hand of her hostess with an affectionate strength that showed the impression the poor widow's words had made upon her. Then, giving another tone to her voice, she cried out cheerfully, going a few steps up the ladder to speak more easily, "And you--?"

The trap-door opened, and the smiling face of Bonneville looked down.

"How are you getting on?" said the peasant-woman, ending her sentence.

"All ready to do it over again, if your service requires it," he replied.

She thanked him by a smile.

"Who was it came here just now?" asked Bonneville.

"A peasant named Courtin, who didn't seem to be one of our friends."

"Ah, ha! the mayor of La Logerie?"

"That's the man."

"I know him," continued Bonneville; "Michel told me about him. He is a dangerous man. You ought to have had him followed."

"By whom? There is no one here."

"By Joseph Picaut."

"You know our brave Jean Oullier's repugnance to him."

"And yet he's a White," cried the widow,--"a White, who stood by and let them kill his brother."

The duchess and Bonneville both gave a start of horror.

"Then it is far better we should not mix him in our affairs," said Bonneville. "He would bring a curse with him. But have you no one we could put as sentry near the house, Madame Picaut?"

"Jean Oullier has provided some one, and I have sent my nephew on to the moor of Saint-Pierre; he can see over the whole country from there."

"But he is only a child," said the pretended peasant-woman.

"Safer than certain men," said the widow.

"After all," remarked Bonneville, "we haven't long to wait; it will be dark in three hours, and then our friends will be here with horses."

"Three hours!" said the young woman, whose mind had been painfully pre-occupied ever since her talk with the widow. "Many things may happen in three hours, my

poor Bonneville."

"Some one is running in," cried Marianne Picaut, rushing from the window to the door, which she opened quickly. "Is it you, nephew?"

"Yes, aunt; yes!" cried the boy, out of breath.

"What is it?"

"Oh, aunt! aunt! the soldiers! They are coming up; they surprised and killed the man who was on the watch."

"The soldiers?" cried Joseph Picaut, who from his own door heard the cry of his boy.

"What can we do?" asked Bonneville.

"Wait for them," said the young peasant-woman.

"Why not attempt to escape?"

"If Courtin, the man who was here just now, sends them or brings them, they have surrounded the house."

"Who talks of escaping?" asked the Widow Picaut.

"Did I not say that this house was safe? Have I not sworn that so long as you are within it no harm should happen to you?"

Here the scene was complicated by the entrance of another person. Thinking, probably, that the soldiers were coming after him, Joseph Picaut appeared on the threshold of the widow's door. The house of his sister-in-law, who was known to be a Blue, may have seemed to him a safe asylum. Perceiving the widow's guests, he started back in surprise.

"Ha! so you have White gentlefolk here, have you? I see now why the soldiers are coming; you have sold your guests."

"Wretch!" cried Marianne, seizing her husband's sabre, which hung over the fireplace, and springing at Joseph, who raised his gun and aimed at her.

Bonneville sprang down the ladder; but the young peasant-woman had already flung herself between the brother and sister, covering the widow with her body.

"Lower your gun!" she cried to the Vendéan, in a tone that seemed not to come from that frail and delicate body, so male and energetic was it. "Lower your gun! in the king's name I command it!"

"Who are you who speak thus to me?" asked Joseph Picaut, always ready to rebel against authority.

"I am she who is expected here,--who commands here."

At these words, said with supreme majesty, Joseph Picaut, speechless, and as if bewildered, dropped his weapon to the ground.

"Now," continued the young woman, "go up in the loft with monsieur."

"But you?" said Bonneville.

"I stay here."

"But--"

"There's no time to argue. Go; go at once!"

The two men mounted the ladder, and the trap-door closed behind them.

"What are you doing?" the young woman asked with surprise, as the widow began to disarrange the bed on which the body of her husband lay and to drag it from the wall.

"I am preparing a hiding-place where no one will seek you."

"But I don't mean to hide myself. No one will recognize me in these clothes. I choose to await them as I am."

"And I choose that you shall not await them," said the Widow Picaut, in so firm a tone that she silenced her visitor. "You heard what that man said; if you are discovered while in my house it will be thought that I sold you, and I do not choose to run the risk of your being discovered."

"You, my enemy?"

"Yes, your enemy, who would lie down on this bed and die if she saw you made prisoner."

There was no reply to make. The widow of Pascal Picaut raised the mattress on which the body lay, and hid the clothes and shirt and shoes, which had so awakened Courtin's curiosity, beneath it. Then she pointed to a place between the mattress and the straw bed, on the side toward the wall, wide enough for a small person to lie, and the young woman glided into it without resistance, making for herself a breathing-space at the edge. Then the widow pushed the bedstead back into its place.

Mistress Picaut had barely time to look carefully into every corner of the room to make sure that nothing compromising to her guests was left about, when she heard the click of arms, and the figure of an officer passed before the casement.

"This must be the place," she heard him say, addressing a companion who walked behind him.

"What do you want?" asked the widow, opening the door.

"You have strangers here; we wish to see them," replied the officer.

"Ah, ça! don't you recognize me?" interrupted Marianne Picaut, avoiding a direct reply.

"Yes; of course, I recognize you. You are the woman who served us as guide last night."

"Well, if I guided you in search of the enemies of the government, it isn't likely I should be hiding them here now, is it?"

"That's logical enough, isn't it, captain?" said the second officer.

"Bah! one can't trust any of these people; they are brigands from the breast," replied the lieutenant. "Didn't you notice that boy, a little scamp not ten years old, who in spite of our shouts and threats ran across the moor at full speed? He was their

sentinel; they have been warned. Happily, they have not had time to escape; they must be hidden somewhere here."

"Possibly."

"Certainly." Then, turning to the widow, he said, "We shall not do you any harm, but we must search the house."

"As you please," she said, with perfect composure.

Seating herself quietly in the corner of the fireplace, she took her shuttle and distaff, which she had left upon a chair, and began to spin.

The lieutenant made a sign with his hand to five or six soldiers, who now entered the room. Looking carefully about him, he went up to the bed.

The widow grew paler than the flax on her shuttle. Her eyes flamed; the distaff slipped from her fingers. The officer looked under the bed, then along the sides of it, and, finally, put out his hand to raise the sheet that covered the body. Pascal's widow could contain herself no longer. She rose, bounded to the corner of the room where her husband's gun was leaning, resolutely cocked it, and threatening the officer, exclaimed:--

"If you lay a hand on that body, so sure as I am an honest woman, I will shoot you like a dog."

The second lieutenant pulled away his comrade by the arm. The Widow Picaut, without laying down the weapon, approached the bed, and for the second time she raised the sheet that covered the dead.

"See there!" she said. "That man, who was my husband, was killed yesterday in your service."

"Ah! true; our first guide,--the one that was killed at the ford of the river," said the lieutenant.

"Poor woman!" said his companion; "let us leave her in peace. It is a pity to torment

her at such a time."

"And yet," replied the first officer, "the information of the man we met was precise and circumstantial."

"We did wrong not to oblige him to come back with us."

"Have you any other room than this?" said the chief officer to the widow.

"I have the loft above, and that stable over the way."

"Search the loft and the stable; but first, open all the chests and closets, and look carefully in the oven."

The soldiers spread themselves through the house to execute these orders. From her terrible hiding-place the young woman heard every word of the conversation. She also heard the steps of the soldiers as they mounted the ladder to the loft, and she trembled with greater fear at that sound than when the officer had attempted to remove the death-sheet that concealed her, for she thought, with terror, that Bonneville's hiding-place was far less safe than her own.

When, therefore, she heard those who had gone to search the loft coming down, without any sound of a struggle or cry to show that the men were discovered, her heart was lightened of a heavy load.

The first lieutenant was waiting in the lower room, and was seated on the bread-box. The second officer was directing the search of eight or ten of the soldiers in the stable.

"Well," asked the first lieutenant, "have you found anything?"

"No," said a corporal.

"Did you shake the straw, the hay, and everything?"

"We prodded everywhere with our bayonets. If there was a man hidden anywhere it is impossible he should have escaped being stabbed."

"Very good; then we will go to the adjoining house. These persons must be

somewhere."

The men left the room, and the officer followed them.

While the soldiers continued their exploration the lieutenant stood leaning against the outer wall of the house, looking suspiciously at a little pent-house he resolved to search carefully. Suddenly a bit of plaster, no bigger than a man's finger, fell at his feet. He raised his head and fancied he saw a hand disappearing under the roof.

"Here!" he cried to his men, in a voice of thunder.

The soldiers surrounded him.

"You are a pretty set of fellows!" he said; "you do your business finely!"

"What's happened, lieutenant?" asked the men.

"It has happened that the men are up there in the very loft you pretend to have searched. Go up again, quick! and don't leave a spear of straw unturned."

The soldiers re-entered the widow's house. They went straight to the trap-door and tried to raise it; but this time it resisted. It was fastened from above.

"Good! now the matter is plain enough," said the officer, putting his own foot upon the ladder. "Come," he cried, raising his voice to be heard in the loft, "out of your lair, or we'll fetch you."

The sound of a sharp discussion was heard; it was evident that the besieged were not agreed as to their line of action. This is what had happened with them:--

Bonneville and his companion, instead of hiding under the thick hay, where the soldiers would, of course, chiefly look for them, had slipped under a light pile of it, not more than two feet deep, which lay close to the trap-door. What they hoped for had happened; the soldiers almost walked over them, prodding the places where the hay lay thicker, but neglecting to examine that part of the loft where it seemed to be only a carpet. The searching party retired, as we have seen, without finding those they were looking for.

From their hiding-place, with their ears to the floor, which was thin, Bonneville and the Vendéan could hear distinctly all that was said in the room below. Hearing the officer give the order to search his house, Joseph Picaut grew uneasy, for in it was a quantity of gunpowder, the possession of which might get him into trouble. In spite of his companion's remonstrances, he left his hiding-place to watch the soldiers through the chinks left between the wall and the roof of the loft. It was then that he knocked off the fragment of plaster which fell near the officer and re-awakened his attention; and it was Joseph's hand the lieutenant had noticed, which he had rested against a rafter, while leaning forward to look into the yard.

When Bonneville heard the officer's shout and knew that he and his companion were discovered, he sprang to the trap-door and fastened it, bitterly reproaching the Vendéan for the folly of his conduct. But reproaches were useless now that they were discovered; it was necessary to decide on a course.

"You saw them, at any rate," said Bonneville.

"Yes," replied Joseph Picaut.

"How many are there?"

"About thirty, I should say."

"Then resistance would be folly. Besides, they have not discovered Madame, and our arrest would take them away from here, and make her safety with your brave sister-in-law more secure."

"Then your advice is?" questioned Picaut.

"To surrender."

"Surrender!" cried the Vendéan. "Never!"

"Why not?"

"Oh, I know what you are thinking of! You are a gentleman; you are rich. They'll put you in a fine prison, where you'll have all your comforts. But me!--they'll send

me to the galleys, where I've already spent fourteen years. No, no; I'd rather lie in a bed of earth than a convict's bed,--a grave rather than a cell."

"If a struggle compromised ourselves only," said Bonneville, "I swear I would share your fate, and, like you, they should not take me living; but it is the mother of our king that we must save, and this is no moment to consult our own likings."

"On the contrary, let us kill all we can; the fewer enemies of Henri V. we leave alive, the better. Never will I surrender, I tell you that!" cried the Vendéan, putting his foot on the trap-door, which Bonneville was about to raise.

"Oh," said the count, frowning, "you will obey me, and without replying, I presume!"

Picaut burst out laughing.

But in the midst of his threatening mirth, a blow from Bonneville's fist sent him sprawling to the other end of the loft. As he fell he dropped his gun; but in falling he came against the loft window, which was closed by a wooden shutter. A sudden idea struck him,--to let the young man surrender, and profit by the diversion to escape himself.

While, therefore, Bonneville opened the trap-door, he himself undid the shutter, picked up his gun, and as the count called down from the top of the ladder, "Don't fire; we surrender!" the Vendéan leaned forward, discharged his gun into the group of soldiers, turned again, and sprang with a prodigious bound from the loft to a heap of manure in the garden; and after drawing the fire of one or two soldiers stationed as sentinels, he reached the forest and disappeared.

The shot from the loft brought down one man, dangerously wounded. But ten muskets were instantly pointed on Bonneville; and before the mistress of the house could fling herself forward and make a rampart with her body for him, as she tried to do, the unfortunate young man, pierced by seven or eight balls, rolled down the ladder to the widow's feet, crying out with his last breath:--

"Vive Henri V!"

To this last cry from Bonneville came an echoing cry of grief and of despair. The tumult that followed the explosion and Bonneville's fall hindered the soldiers from noticing this second cry, which came from Pascal Picaut's bed, and seemed to issue from the breast of the corpse, as it lay there, majestically calm and impassible amid the horrors of this terrible scene.

The lieutenant saw, through the smoke, that the widow was on her knees, with Bonneville's head, which she had raised, pressed to her breast.

"Is he dead?" he asked.

"Yes," said Marianne, in a voice choking with emotion.

"But you yourself,--you are wounded."

Great drops of blood were falling thick, and fast from the widow's forehead upon Bonneville's breast.

"I?" she said.

"Yes; your blood is flowing."

"What matters my blood, if not a drop remains in him for whom I could not die as I had sworn?" she cried.

At this moment a soldier looked down through the trapdoor.

"Lieutenant," he said, "the other has escaped through the loft; we fired at him and missed him."

"The other!" cried the lieutenant; "it is the other we want!"--supposing, very naturally, that the one who had escaped was Petit-Pierre. "But unless he finds another guide we are sure of him. After him, instantly!" Then reflecting, "But first, my good woman, get up," he continued. "You men, search that body."

The order was executed; but nothing was found in Bonneville's pocket, for the good reason that he was wearing Pascal Picaut's clothes, which the widow had given him

while she dried his own.

"Now," said Marianne Picaut, when the order was obeyed, "he is really mine, is he not?" and she stretched her arm over the body of the young man.

"Yes; do what you please with him. But thank God that you were useful to us last night, or I should have sent you to Nantes to be taught there what it costs to give aid and comfort to rebels."

With these words, the lieutenant assembled his men and marched quickly away in the direction the fugitive had taken. As soon as they were well out of sight the widow ran to the bed, and lifting the side of the mattress, she drew out the body of the princess, who had swooned.

Ten minutes later Bonneville's body was laid beside that of Pascal Picaut; and the two women,--the presumptive regent and the humble peasant,--kneeling beside the bed, prayed together for these, the first two victims of the last insurrection of La Vendée.

XLII.

IN WHICH JEAN OULLIER, SPEAKS HIS MIND ABOUT YOUNG BARON MICHEL.

While the melancholy events we have just related were taking place in the house where Jean Oullier had left poor Bonneville and his companion, all was excitement, movement, joy, and tumult in the household of the Marquis de Souday.

The old gentleman could hardly contain himself for joy. He had reached the moment he had coveted so long! He now chose for his war-apparel the least shabby hunting-clothes he could find in his wardrobe. Girt, in his quality as corps-commander, with a white scarf (which his daughters had long since embroidered for him in anticipation of this call to arms), with the bloody heart upon his breast, and a rosary in his button-hole,--in short, the full-dress insignia of a

royalist chief on grand occasions,--he tried the temper of his sabre on all the articles of furniture that came in his way.

Also, from time to time, he exercised his voice to a tone of command, by drilling Michel, and even the notary, whom he insisted on enrolling into the number of his recruits, but who, notwithstanding the violence of his legitimist opinions, thought it judicious not to manifest them in a manner that was ultra-loyal.

Bertha, like her father, had put on a costume which she intended to wear on such expeditions. This was composed of a little overcoat of green velvet, open in front, and showing a shirt-frill of dazzling whiteness; the coat was trimmed with frogs and loops of black gimp, and it fitted the figure closely. The dress was completed by enormously wide trousers of gray cloth, which came down to a pair of high huzzar boots reaching to the knee. The young girl wore no scarf about her waist, the scarf being considered among Vendéans as a sign of command; but she was careful to wear the white emblem on her arm, held there by a red ribbon.

This costume brought out the grace and suppleness of Bertha's figure; and her gray felt hat, with its white feathers, lent itself marvellously well to the manly character of her face. Seen thus, she was enchanting. Although, by reason of her masculine ways, Bertha was certainly not coquettish, she could not prevent herself, in her present condition of mind or rather of heart, from noticing with satisfaction the advantages her physical gifts derived from this equipment. Perceiving, too, that it produced a great impression upon Michel, she became as exuberantly joyful as the marquis himself.

The truth is that Michel, whose mind had by this time reached a certain enthusiasm for his new cause, did not see without an admiration he gave himself no trouble to conceal the proud carriage and chivalric bearing of Bertha de Souday in her present dress. But this admiration, let us hasten to remark, came chiefly from the thought of what his beloved Mary's grace would be in such a costume,--for he did not doubt the

sisters would make the campaign together in the same uniform.

His eyes had, therefore, gently questioned Mary, as if to ask her why she did not adorn herself like Bertha. But Mary had shown such coldness, such reserve, since the double scene in the turret chamber, she avoided so obviously saying a word to him, that the natural timidity of the young man increased, and he dared not risk more than the appealing look we have referred to.

It was Bertha, therefore, and not Michel, who urged Mary to make haste and put on her riding-dress. Mary did not answer; her sad looks made a painful contrast to the general gayety. She nevertheless obeyed Bertha's behest and went up to her chamber. The costume she intended to wear lay all ready on a chair; but instead of putting out her hand to take it, she merely looked at the garments with a pallid smile and seated herself on her little bed, while the big tears rolled from her eyes and down her cheeks.

Mary, who was religious and artless, had been thoroughly sincere and true in the impulse which led her to her present rôle of sacrifice and self-abnegation through devotion and tenderness to her sister; but it is none the less true that she had counted too much on her strength to sustain it. From the beginning of the struggle against herself which she saw before her, she felt, not that her resolution would fail,--her resolution would be ever the same,--but that her confidence in the result of her efforts was diminishing.

All the morning she kept saying to herself, "You ought not, you must not love him;" but the echo still came back, "I love him, love him!" At every step she made under the empire of these feelings, Mary felt herself more and more estranged from all that had hitherto made her joy and life. The stir, the movement, the virile excitements, which had hitherto amused her girlhood, now seemed to her intolerable; political interests themselves were effaced in presence of this deeper personal preoccupation which superseded all others. All that could distract her heart from the thoughts she

longed to drive from her mind escaped her like a covey of birds when she came near it.

She saw, distinctly, at every turn, how in this fatal struggle she would be worsted, isolated, abandoned, with no support except her own will, with no consolation other than that which ought to come from her devotion itself; and she wept bitter tears of grief as well as fear, of regret as much as of apprehension. By her present suffering she measured the anguish yet to come.

For about half an hour she sat there, sad, thoughtful, and self-absorbed, tossing, with no power of escape, in the maelstrom of her grief, and then she heard on the outside of her door, which was partly open, the voice of Jean Oullier, saying, in the peculiar tone he kept for the two young girls, to whom he had made himself, as we have seen, a second father:--

"What is the matter, my dear Mademoiselle Mary?"

Mary shuddered, as though she were waking from a dream; and she answered the honest peasant with a smile, but also with embarrassment:--

"Matter,--with me? Why, nothing, my dear Jean, I assure you."

But Jean Oullier meanwhile had considered her attentively. Coming nearer by several steps, and shaking his head as he looked at her fixedly, he said, in a tone of gentle and respectful scolding:--

"Why do you say that, little Mary? Do you doubt my friendship?"

"I?--I?" cried Mary.

"Yes; you must doubt it, since you try to deceive me."

Mary held out her hand. Jean Oullier took that slender and delicate little hand between his two great ones, and looked at the young girl sadly.

"Ah! my sweet little Mary," he said, as if she were still ten years old, "there is no rain without clouds, there are no tears without grief. Do you remember when you

were a little child how you cried because Bertha threw your shells into the well? Well, that night, you know, Jean Oullier tramped forty miles, and your pretty sea-baubles were replaced the next day, and your pretty blue eyes were all dry and shining."

"Yes, my kind Jean Oullier; yes, indeed, I remember it," said Mary, who just now felt a special need of expression.

"Well," said Jean Oullier, "since then I've grown old, but my tenderness for you has only deepened. Tell me your trouble, Mary. If there is a remedy, I shall find it; if there is none, my withered old eyes will weep with yours."

Mary knew how difficult it would be to mislead the clear-sighted solicitude of her old servant. She hesitated, blushed, and then, without deciding to tell the cause of her tears, she began to explain them.

"I am crying, my poor Jean," she replied, "because I fear this war will cost me, perhaps, the lives of all I love."

Mary, alas! had learned to lie since the previous evening. But Jean Oullier was not to be taken in with any such answer, and shaking his head gently, he said:--

"No, little Mary; that's not the cause of your tears. When old fellows like the marquis and I are caught by the glamor and see nothing in the coming struggle but victory, a young heart like yours doesn't go out of its way to predict reverses."

Mary would not admit herself beaten. "And yet, Jean," she said, taking one of the coaxing attitudes which she knew by long practice were all-powerful over the will of the worthy man, "I assure you it is so."

"No, no; it is not so, I tell you," persisted Jean Oullier, still grave, and growing more and more anxious.

"What is it, then?" demanded Mary.

"Ah!" said the old keeper; "do you want me to tell you the cause of your tears? Do

you really want me to tell you that?"

"Yes, if you can."

"Well, your tears,--it is hard to say it, but I think it, I do,--they are caused by that miserable little Monsieur Michel; there!"

Mary turned as white as the curtains of her bed; all her blood flowed back to her heart.

"What do you mean, Jean?" she stammered.

"I mean to say that you have seen as well as I what is going on, and that you don't like it any more than I do. Only, I'm a man, and I get in a rage; you are a girl, and you cry."

Mary could not repress a sob as she felt Jean Oullier's finger in her wound.

"It is not astonishing," continued the keeper, muttering to himself; "wolf as they call you,--those curs,--you are still a woman, and a woman kneaded of the best flour that ever fell from the sifter of the good God."

"Really, Jean, I don't understand you."

"Oh, yes; you do understand me very well, little Mary. Yes; you have seen what is happening the same as I have. Who wouldn't see it?--good God! One must be blind not to, for she takes no pains to hide it."

"But whom are you speaking of, Jean? Tell me; don't you see that you are killing me with anxiety?"

"Whom should I be speaking of but Mademoiselle Bertha?"

"My sister?"

"Yes, your sister, who parades herself about with that greenhorn; who means to drag him in her train to our camp; and, meantime, having tied him to her apron-strings for fear he should get away, is exhibiting him to everybody all round as a conquest, without considering what the people in the house and the friends of the marquis will

say,--not to speak of that mischievous notary, who is watching it all with his little eyes, and mending his pen already to draw the contract."

"But supposing all that is so," said Mary, whose paleness was now succeeded by a high color, and whose heart was beating as though it would break,--"supposing all that is so, where is the harm?"

"Harm! Do you ask where's the harm? Why, just now my blood was boiling to see a Demoiselle de Souday-- Oh, there! there! don't let's talk of it!"

"Yes, yes; on the contrary, I wish to talk of it," insisted Mary. "What was Bertha doing just now, my good Jean Oullier?"

And the girl looked persuasively at the keeper.

"Well, Mademoiselle Bertha de Souday tied the white scarf to Monsieur Michel's arm,--the colors borne by Charette on the arm of the son of him who-- Ah! stop, stop, little Mary; you'll make me say things I mustn't say! Little she cares--Mademoiselle Bertha--that your father is out of temper with me to-day, all about that young fellow, too."

"My father! Have you been speaking to him--"

Mary stopped.

"Of course I have," replied Jean, taking the question in its literal sense,--"of course I have spoken to him."

"When?"

"This morning: first, when I brought him Petit-Pierre's letter; and then when I gave him the list of the men who are in his division, and who will march with us. I know they are not as numerous as they should be; but he who does what he can does what he ought. What do you think he answered me when I asked him if that young Monsieur Michel was really going to be one of us?"

"I don't know," said Mary.

"'God's death!' he cried; 'you recruit so badly that I am obliged to get some one to help your work. Yes, Monsieur Michel is one of us; and if you don't like it go and find fault with Mademoiselle Bertha.'"

"He said that to you, my poor Jean?"

"Yes; and I mean to have a talk with Mademoiselle Bertha, that I do."

"Jean, my friend, take care!"

"Take care of what?"

"Take care not to grieve her, not to make her angry. She loves him, Jean," said Mary, in a voice that was scarcely audible.

"Ah! then you do admit she loves him?" cried Jean Oullier.

"I am forced to do so," said Mary.

"Love a little puppet that a breath can tip over!" sneered Jean Oullier,--"she, Mademoiselle Bertha, change her name, one of the oldest in the land, one of the names that make our glory, the peasants' glory, as they do that of the men who bear them,--change a name like that for the name of a coward and a traitor!"

Mary's heart was wrung in her bosom.

"Jean, my friend," she said; "you go too far, Jean. Don't say such things, I entreat you."

"It shall not be," continued Jean Oullier, paying no heed to Mary's interruption, and walking up and down the room; "no, it shall not be. If all the rest are indifferent to the family honor I will watch over it, and rather than see it tarnished I,--well, I will--"

And Jean Oullier made a threatening gesture, the meaning of which was unmistakable.

"No, Jean; no, you would never do that," cried Mary, in a heart-rending voice. "I implore you with clasped hands."

And she almost fell forward on her knees. The Vendéan stepped back, horrified.

"You,--you, too, little Mary?" he cried; "you love--"

But she did not give him time to end his sentence.

"Think, Jean, only think of the grief you would cause to my dear Bertha."

Jean Oullier was looking at her in stupefaction, only half-relieved of the suspicion he had just conceived, when Bertha's voice was heard ordering Michel to wait for her in the garden and on no account to go away. Almost at the same moment she opened the door of her sister's room.

"Well!" she exclaimed; "is this how you get ready?" Then, looking closer at Mary and noticing the trouble in her face, she continued, "What is the matter? You have been crying! And you, Jean Oullier,--you look as cross as a bear. What's going on here?"

"I'll tell you what's going on, Mademoiselle Bertha," replied the Vendéan.

"No, no!" exclaimed Mary; "I entreat you not, Jean. Hold your tongue; oh, do be silent!"

"You scare me with such preambles," cried Bertha; "and Jean is looking at me with an inquisitorial air as if I had committed some great crime. Come, speak out, Jean; I am fully disposed to be kind and indulgent on this happy day, when all my most ardent dreams are realized, and I can share with men their noblest privilege of war!"

"Be frank, Demoiselle Bertha," said the Vendéan; "is that the true reason why you are so joyful?"

"Ha! now I see what the matter is," said Bertha, boldly facing the question. "Major-General Oullier wants to scold me for trenching on his functions." Turning to her sister, she added, "I'll bet, Mary, that it is all about my poor Michel."

"Exactly, mademoiselle," said Jean Oullier, not leaving Mary time to answer.

"Well, what have you to say about him, Jean? My father is delighted to get another

adherent, and I can't see anything in that to make you frown."

"Your father may like it," replied the old keeper, "but it doesn't suit the rest of us; we have other ideas."

"May I be allowed to know them?"

"We think each side should stay in its own camp."

"Well?"

"Well what?"

"Go on; finish what you mean to say."

"I mean to say that Monsieur Michel's place is not with us."

"Why not? Monsieur Michel is royalist, isn't he? I think he has given proof enough during the last two days of his devotion to the cause."

"That may be; but all the same, Demoiselle Bertha, we peasants have a way of saying, 'Like father, like son,' and therefore we don't believe in Monsieur Michel's royalism."

"He will force you to believe in it."

"Possibly; meanwhile--"

The Vendéan frowned.

"Meanwhile, what?" said Bertha.

"Well, I tell you, it will be painful to old soldiers like me to march cheek by jowl with a man we don't respect."

"What possible blame can you put on him?" asked Bertha, beginning to show some bitterness.

"Much."

"Much means nothing unless you specify it."

"Well, his father, his birth--"

"His father! his birth!" interrupted Bertha; "always the same nonsense! Let me tell you, Jean Oullier," she cried, frowning darkly, "that it is precisely on account of his father and his birth that he interests me, that young man."

"Why so?"

"Because my heart revolts against the unjust reproaches which he is made to endure from all our party. I am tired of hearing him blamed for a birth he did not choose, for a father he never knew, for faults he never committed, and which, perhaps, his father never committed. All that makes me indignant, Jean Oullier; it disgusts me. And I think it a noble and generous action to encourage that young man and help him to repair the past,--if there is anything to repair,--and to show himself so brave and so devoted that calumny will not dare to meddle with him in future."

"I don't care," retorted Jean Oullier; "he will have a good deal to do before I, for one, respect the name he bears."

"You must respect it, Jean Oullier," said Bertha, in a stern voice, "when I bear it, as I hope to do."

"Oh, yes! so you say," cried Jean Oullier; "but I don't yet believe you mean it."

"Ask Mary," said Bertha, turning to her sister, who was listening, pale and palpitating, to the discussion, as though her life depended on it; "ask my sister, to whom I have opened my heart, and who knows my hopes and fears. Yes, Jean, all concealments, all constraints are hateful to me; and I am glad, especially with you, to have thrown off mine and to speak openly. Well, I tell you boldly, Jean Oullier,--as boldly as I say everything,--I love him!"

"No, no; don't say that, I implore you, Demoiselle Bertha. I am but a poor peasant, but in former days--it is true you were but a little thing--you gave me the right to call you my child; and I have loved you, and I do love you both as no father ever loved his own daughters: well, the old man who watched over you in childhood, who held you on his knee, and rocked you to sleep, night after night, that old man, whose only

happiness you are in this low world, flings himself on his knees to say, Don't love that man, I implore you, Bertha!"

"Why not?" she said, impatiently.

"Because,--and I say this from the bottom of my heart, on my soul and conscience,--because a marriage between you and him is an evil thing,--a monstrous, impossible thing!"

"Your attachment to us makes you exaggerate everything, my poor Jean. Monsieur Michel loves me, I believe; I love him, I am sure, and if he bravely accomplishes the task of distinguishing his name, I shall be most happy in becoming his wife."

"Then," said Jean Oullier, in a tone of deep depression, "I must look in my old age for other masters and another home."

"Why?"

"Because Jean Oullier, poor and of no account as he may be, will never make his home with the son of a renegade and a traitor."

"Hush! Jean Oullier, hush!" cried Bertha. "Hush, I say, or I may break your heart."

"Jean! my good Jean!" murmured Mary.

"No, no," said the old keeper; "you ought to be told the noble actions which have glorified the name you are so eager to take in exchange for your own."

"Don't say another word, Jean Oullier," interrupted Bertha, in a tone that was almost threatening. "Come, I'll tell you now, I have often questioned my heart to know which I loved best, my father or you; but if you say another word, if you utter another insult against my Michel, you will be no more to me than--"

"Than a servant," interrupted Jean Oullier. "Yes; but a servant who is honest, and who all his life has done his duty without betraying it,--a servant who has the right to cry shame on the son of him who sold Charette, as Judas sold Christ, for a sum of money."

"What do I care for what happened thirty-six years ago,--eighteen years before I was born? I know the one who lives, and not the one who is dead,--the son, not the father. I love him; do you hear me, Jean? I love him as you yourself have taught me to love and hate. If his father did as you say, which I will not believe, but if he did, we will put such glory on the name of Michel--on the name of the traitor and renegade--that every one shall bow before it; and you shall help in doing so,--yes, you, Jean Oullier,--for I repeat, I love him, and nothing but death can quench the spring of tenderness that flows to him from my heart."

Mary moaned almost inaudibly; but slight as the sound was, Jean Oullier heard it. He turned to her. Then, as if crushed by the plaint of one and the violence of the other, he dropped on a chair and hid his face in his hands. The old Vendéan wept, but he wished to hide his tears. Bertha understood what was passing in that devoted heart; she went to him and knelt beside him.

"You can measure the strength of my feelings for that young man," she said, "by the fact that it has almost led me to forget my deep and true affection for you."

Jean Oullier shook his head sadly.

"I comprehend your antipathies, your feelings of repugnance," continued Bertha, "and I was prepared for their expression; but, patience, my old friend, patience and resignation! God alone can take out of my heart that which he has put there; and he will not do that, for it would kill me. Give us time to prove to you that your prejudices are unjust, and that he whom I have chosen is indeed worthy of me."

At this instant they heard the marquis calling for Jean Oullier in a voice that showed some new and serious event had happened. Jean Oullier rose and went to the door.

"Stop!" said Bertha; "are you going without answering me?"

"Monsieur le marquis calls me, mademoiselle," replied the Vendéan, in a chilling tone.

"Mademoiselle!" cried Bertha; "mademoiselle. Ah! you will not listen to my

entreaties? Well, then, remember this: I forbid you--mark, I forbid you--to offer any insult of any kind to Monsieur Michel; I command that his life be sacred to you. If any evil happens to him through you I will avenge it, not on you but on myself; and you know, Jean Oullier, whether or not I do as I say."

Jean Oullier looked at the girl; then taking her by the arm, he said:--

"Maybe it would be better so than to let you marry that man."

The marquis now called louder than ever, and Jean Oullier rushed from the room, leaving Bertha bewildered by his resistance, and Mary bowed down beneath the terror which the violence of her sister's love inspired in her.

XLIII.

BARON MICHEL BECOMES BERTHA's AIDE-DE-CAMP.

Jean Oullier went down, as we have said, in haste; perhaps he was more anxious to get away from the young girl than to obey the call of the marquis. He found the latter in the courtyard, and beside him stood a peasant, covered with mud and sweat.

The man had just brought news that Pascal Picaut's house was surrounded by soldiers; he had seen them go in, and that was all he knew. He had been stationed among the gorse on the road to Sablonnière, with orders from Jean Oullier to come to the château at once if the soldiers should go in the direction of the house where the fugitives had taken refuge. This mission he had fulfilled to the letter.

The marquis, to whom of course Jean Oullier had told how he left Petit-Pierre and the Comte de Bonneville in Pascal Picaut's house, was terribly alarmed.

"Jean Oullier! Jean Oullier!" he kept repeating, in the tone of Augustus calling, "Varus! Varus!" "Jean Oullier, why did you trust others instead of yourself? If any misfortune has happened my poor house will be dishonored before it is ruined!"

Jean Oullier did not answer; he held his head down gloomily, in silence. This silence and immovability exasperated the marquis.

"My horse! my horse, Jean Oullier!" he cried; "and if that lad, whom yesterday, not knowing who he was, I called my young friend, is made prisoner by the Blues, let us show by dying to deliver him that we were not unworthy of his confidence."

But Jean Oullier shook his head.

"What!" exclaimed the marquis; "don't you mean to fetch my horse?"

"Jean is right," said Bertha, who had come upon the scene and had heard her father's order and Jean Oullier's refusal; "we must not risk anything by precipitate action." Turning to the scout, she asked, "Did you see the soldiers leave Picaut's house with prisoners?"

"No; I saw them knock down the gars Malherbe, whom Jean Oullier stationed on the rise of the hill, and I watched them till they entered Picaut's orchard. Then I came here at once, as Jean Oullier ordered me to do."

"Are you sure, Jean Oullier," said Bertha, "that you can answer for the faithfulness of the woman in whose charge you left them?"

"Yesterday," he said, giving Bertha a reproachful look, "I should have said of Marianne Picaut that I could trust her as myself; but--"

"But?" questioned Bertha.

"But to-day," said the old man, with a sigh, "I doubt everything."

"Come, come!" cried the marquis; "all this is time lost. My horse! bring my horse! and in ten minutes I shall know the truth."

But Bertha stopped him.

"Ha!" he exclaimed; "is this the way I am obeyed in this house? What can I expect from others if in my own family no one obeys my orders?"

"Your orders are sacred, father," said Bertha,--"to your daughters, above all; but your ardor is carrying you away. Do not forget that those for whose safety we are so anxious are merely peasants in the eyes of others. If the Marquis de Souday goes

himself in search of two missing peasants their importance will be known directly, and the news will reach our enemies."

"Mademoiselle Bertha is right," said Jean Oullier; "it is better for me to go."

"Not you, any more than my father," said Bertha.

"Why not?"

"Because you run too great a risk in going over there."

"I went there this morning; and if I ran that risk to find out whose ball killed my poor Pataud, I can certainly do the same to learn news of M. de Bonneville and Petit-Pierre."

"I tell you, Jean," persisted Bertha, "that after all that happened yesterday you must not show yourself where the soldiers are. We must find some one who is not compromised, and who can get to the heart of the matter without exciting suspicion."

"How unlucky that that animal of a Loriot would go back to Machecoul!" said the marquis. "I begged him to stay; I had a presentiment that I should want him."

"Well, haven't you Monsieur Michel?" said Jean Oullier, in a sarcastic tone; "you can send him to the Picaut's house, or anywhere else, without suspicion. If there were ten thousand men guarding it they'd let him in; and no one, I am sure, would imagine he came on any business of yours."

"Yes; he is just the person we want," said Bertha, accepting the support thus given to her secret purpose, and ignoring Jean Oullier's malicious intention in making it. "Isn't he, father?"

"On my soul, I think so!" cried the marquis. "Though he is rather effeminate in appearance, the young man may turn out very useful."

At the first rumor of alarm Michel had approached the marquis, as if awaiting orders. When he heard Bertha's proposition, and saw it accepted by her father, his

face became radiant. Bertha herself was beaming.

"Are you ready to do all that is necessary for the safety of Petit-Pierre, Monsieur Michel?" she said.

"I am ready to do anything you wish, mademoiselle, in order to prove my gratitude to Monsieur le marquis for the friendly welcome I have received from him."

"Very good. Then take a horse--not mine; it would be recognized--and gallop over there. Go into the house unarmed, as though curiosity alone brought you, and if our friends are in danger light a fire of brush on the heath. During that time Jean Oullier will assemble his men; and then, in a body and well-armed, we can fly to the support of those so dear to us."

"Bravo!" cried the Marquis de Souday; "I have always said that Bertha was the strong-minded one of the family."

Bertha smiled with pride and looked at Michel.

"And you," she said to her sister, who had now come down and joined them quietly, just as Michel departed to get his horse,--"and you, don't you mean to dress and go with us?"

"No," replied Mary.

"Why not?"

"I mean to stay as I am."

"Oh! you can't mean it!"

"Yes, I do," said Mary, with a sad smile. "In an army there are always sisters of mercy to care for the fighting men and comfort them; I shall be the sister of mercy."

Bertha looked at Mary with amazement. She may have been about to question her as to this sudden change of mind; but at that instant Michel, already mounted on the horse provided for him, reappeared, and approaching Bertha stopped the words upon her lips. Addressing her as the one to whom he looked for orders, he said:--

"You told me what I was to do in case some misfortune has happened at the Picaut house, mademoiselle; but you have not told me what to do in case I find Petit-Pierre safe and well."

"In that case," said the marquis, "come back here, and set our minds at ease."

"No, no," said Bertha, who was determined to give the man she loved some important part to play; "such goings to and fro would excite suspicion in the various troops now stationed about the forest. You had better stay at the Picauts' or in the neighborhood till nightfall, and then go and wait for us at the July oak. You know where that is, don't you?"

"I should think so!" said Michel; "it is on the road to Souday."

Michel knew every oak and every tree on that road.

"Very good!" said Bertha; "we will be in the woods near by. Make the signal,--three cries of the screech-owl and one hoot,--and we will join you. Go on, dear Monsieur Michel."

Michel bowed to the marquis and to the two young ladies. Then, bending forward over the neck of his horse, he started at a gallop. He was, in truth, an excellent rider, and Bertha called attention to the fact that in turning short out of the porte cochère, he had very cleverly made his horse change step.

"It is amazing how easy it is to make a well-bred gentleman out of a rustic like that," said the marquis, re-entering the château. "It is true that women must have a finger in it. That young man is really passable."

"Oh, yes; well-bred gentlemen, indeed! They are easy enough to make; but men of heart and soul are another thing," muttered Jean Oullier.

"Jean Oullier," said Bertha, "you are forgetting my advice. Take care."

"You are mistaken, mademoiselle," replied Jean Oullier. "It is, on the contrary, because I have forgotten nothing that you see me so troubled. I thought my aversion

to that young man might be remorse," he muttered; "but I begin to fear it is presentiment."

"Remorse!--you, Jean Oullier?"

"Ah! did you hear what I said?"

"Yes."

"Well, I don't unsay it."

"What remorse have you about him?"

"None about him," said Jean Oullier, in a gloomy voice; "I meant his father."

"His father?" said Bertha, shivering in spite of herself.

"Yes," said Jean Oullier. "My name was changed in a day because of him; I was no longer Jean Oullier."

"What were you then?"

"Chastisement."

"On his father?"

Then, remembering all that was told in the region, of the death of Baron Michel the older, she exclaimed:--

"His father! found dead at a hunt! Ah, miserable man! what do you mean?"

"That the son may avenge his father by bringing mourning for mourning upon us."

"In what way?"

"Through you, and because you love him madly."

"What of that?"

"I can myself assure you of one thing."

"And that is?"

"That he does not love you."

Bertha shrugged her shoulders disdainfully; but the blow nevertheless reached her heart. A feeling that was almost hatred to the old Vendéan came over her.

"Employ yourself in collecting your men, Jean Oullier," she said.

"I obey you, mademoiselle," replied the Chouan.

He went toward the gate. Bertha returned to the house, without giving him another look. But before leaving the château, Jean Oullier called up the peasant who had brought the news.

"Before the soldiers got to Picaut's house did you see any one else go in there?"

"To Joseph's place, or Pascal's?"

"Pascal's."

"Yes, I saw one man go in."

"Who was he?"

"The mayor of La Logerie."

"You say he went into Pascal's part of the house?"

"I am sure of it."

"You saw him?"

"As plain as I see you."

"Which way did he go when he left it?"

"Toward Machecoul."

"The same way by which the soldiers came soon after, wasn't it?"

"Exactly; it wasn't half an hour after he left before they came."

"Good!" ejaculated Jean Oullier. Shaking his clenched fist in the direction of La Logerie, he muttered to himself, "Ah, Courtin! Courtin! you are tempting God. My dog killed yesterday, this treachery to-day,--you try my patience too far!"

XLIV.

MAÎTRE JACQUES AND HIS RABBITS.

To the south, of Machecoul, forming a triangle round the village of Légé, stretch three forests. They are called respectively the forests of Touvois, Grandes-Landes, and La Roche-Servière.

The territorial importance of these forests is not great if considered separately; but standing each within three kilometres of the others, and connected by hedges and fields full of gorse and brambles, even more numerous there than elsewhere in La Vendée, they form a very considerable agglomeration of woodland. The result has been that in times of civil war they became a very hot-bed of revolt, where insurrection was fostered and concentrated before it spread through the adjacent regions.

The village of Légé, besides being the native place of the famous physician Jolly, was, almost continuously, Charette's headquarters during the great war. It was there, in the thick belt of woodland surrounding the village that he took refuge if defeated, reformed his decimated battalions, and prepared for other fights.

In 1832, although a new road from Nantes to the Sables-d'Olonne, which runs through Légé, had modified in a measure its strategic strength, the wooded neighborhood was still the most formidable centre of the insurrectionary movement then organized. The three forests hid, in their impenetrable undergrowth of holly and ferns which grew under the shadow of the great thickets, those bands of refractories (conscripts escaping service) whose ranks were daily increasing and forming the kernel of the insurrectionary divisions in the Retz region and on the plains.

The clearings made by government, even the felling of a considerable portion of the wood, had no perceptible result. It was rumored that the deserters had excavated underground dwellings, like those the first Chouans burrowed in the forests of Gralla, in the depths of which they had so often defied the closest search. In this

particular case rumor was not mistaken.

Toward the close of the day when, as we have seen, Michel started on horseback from the château de Souday toward the Picaut cottage, any one who had stood concealed behind one of the huge centennial beeches that surround the glade of Folleron in the forest of Touvois, would have seen a curious sight.

At the hour when the sun, sinking toward the horizon, left a sort of twilight behind it,--an hour when the wood-paths were already in a shadow that seemed to rise from the earth, while the tree-tops were still burnished with the last rays of the dying sunlight,--this concealed spectator would have seen in the distance, and coming toward him, a personage whom, with a very slight stretch of fancy, he might have taken for some uncanny or impish being. This personage advanced slowly, looking cautiously about him,--a matter which seemed to be the more easy because, at first sight, he appeared to have two heads, with which to keep a double watch over his safety.

He was clothed in the sordid rags of an old jacket and the semblance of a pair of breeches, the original cloth of which had completely disappeared beneath the multifarious patches of many colors with which its decay had been remedied; and he appeared, as we have said, to belong to the class of bicephalous monsters who occupy a distinguished place among the choice exceptions which Nature delights to create in her fantastic moments.

The two heads were entirely distinct the one from the other, and though they apparently came from the same trunk there was no family resemblance between them. Beside a broad and brick-dust colored face, seamed with small-pox and covered with unkempt beard, appeared a second face, less repulsive, very astute, and rather malign in its ugliness, whereas the other countenance expressed only a sort of idiocy which might at times amount to ferocity.

These two distinct countenances did, in truth, belong to two men, whose

acquaintance we have already made at Montaigu on the day of the fair; namely, to Aubin Courte-Joie, the tavern keeper, and--if the reader will pardon an almost too expressive name, but one we think we have no right to change--to Trigaud the Vermin, the beggar, whose herculean strength, it will be remembered, played a noted part in the riot at Montaigu by lifting the general's leg from the stirrup and throwing him out of his saddle.

By a judicious arrangement, which we have already mentioned, Aubin Courte-Joie had supplemented, or re-completed, his own personality by the help of this species of beast of burden whom he had, by good luck, encountered on his path through life. In exchange for the two legs he had left on the road to Ancenis, the truncated cripple had obtained a pair of steel limbs, which resisted all fatigue, feared no task, and served him as his own original legs never did and never could have done,--legs, in short, which did his will with passive obedience, and had reached, after a certain period of association, such adaptability that they instinctively guessed the very thoughts of Aubin Courte-Joie, if conveyed by a mere word, a single sign, or even a slight touch of a hand on the shoulder or a knee on the flank.

The strangest part of this affair was that the least satisfied partner in the firm was not Trigaud-Vermin; quite the contrary. His thick brain knew that Aubin Courte-Joie was directing his physical strength in the direction of his sympathies. The words "White" and "Blue," which dropped into his large ears, always pricked up and listening, proved to him that he supported, in his quality of locomotive to the tavern-keeper, a cause whose worship was the one glimmer of light which had survived the collapse of his brain. He made it his glory. His confidence in Aubin Courte-Joie was boundless; he was proud of being linked body and soul to a mind whose superiority he recognized, and he was now attached to the man who might indeed be called his master, with the self-abnegation that characterizes all attachments which instinct governs.

Trigaud carried Aubin sometimes on his back, sometimes on his shoulders, but always as affectionately as a mother carries her child. He took the utmost care of him; he showed him little attentions which seemed to disprove the poor devil's actual idiocy. He never thought of watching his own feet or guarding them from the cutting and wounding of stones and briers; but he carefully held aside, as he walked along, the bushes or branches which he thought might rub the body or scratch the face of his rider.

When they had advanced about a third of the way into the open, Aubin Courte-Joie touched Trigaud on the shoulder, and the giant stopped short. Then, without needing to speak, the inn-keeper pointed with his finger to a large stone lying at the foot of an enormous beech-tree, in the right-hand corner of the clearing.

The giant advanced to the beech, picked up the stone, and awaited orders.

"Now," said Aubin Courte-Joie, "strike three blows."

Trigaud did as he was told, timing the blows so that the second followed the first rapidly, and the third did not sound until after a certain interval.

At this signal, which was made on the trunk of the tree, a little square of turf and moss rose from the ground, and a head beneath it.

"Ho! it's you, is it, Maître Jacques? What's the watch-dog doing at the mouth of the burrow?" asked Aubin, visibly pleased at meeting with an intimate acquaintance.

"Hey! my gars Courte-Joie, this is the hour for business, don't you see; and I never like to let my rabbits out till I make sure myself the hunters are not about."

"And you are right, Maître Jacques; you are right," replied Courte-Joie; "to-day, especially, for there are lots of guns on the plain."

"Hey, how's that, tell me?"

"That's what I want to do."

"But first, won't you come in?"

"Oh, no; no, Jacques. It is hot enough where we are,--isn't it Trigaud?"

The giant uttered a grunt which might, at a pinch, pass for an affirmation.

"Goodness! why, he's speaking!" remarked Maître Jacques. "They used to say he was dumb. You are in luck's way, gars Trigaud, to be taken into Aubin's good graces; do you know that? Why, you are almost a man, not to speak of having your board and lodging sure; and that's more than all dogs can say,--even those at the castle of Souday."

The beggar opened his large mouth and began a chuckle of laughter, which he did not end, for a motion of Aubin's hand stopped in the cavities of his larynx that impulse to hilarity which his powerful lungs rendered dangerous.

"Hush! lower! lower, Trigaud!" he said, roughly. Then turning to Maître Jacques, "He thinks he is in the market-place of Montaigu, poor innocent!"

"Well, as you won't come in, I'll call out the gars. You're right, my Courte-Joie; it is devilish hot inside. Some of 'em say they are roasted; but you know how such fellows grumble."

"That's not like Trigaud," replied Aubin, pounding with his fist, by way of a caress, on the head of the elephant who served him as steed; "he never complains,--not he!"

Trigaud gave a nod of gratitude for the signs of friendship with which Courte-Joie honored him.

Maître Jacques, whom we have just presented to our readers, but with whom it remains for us to make them fully acquainted, was a man of fifty to fifty-five years of age, who had all the external appearance of a worthy farmer of the Retz region. Though his hair was long and floated on his shoulders, his beard, on the contrary, was cut close and shaved with the utmost care. He wore a perfectly clean jacket of gray cloth, cut in a shape that was almost modern compared with those that were still in use in La Vendée, and a waistcoat, also of cloth, in broad stripes, alternately white and fawn-colored. Breeches of coarse brown cloth and gaiters of blue twilled

cotton were the only part of his costume which resembled that of his compatriots.

A pair of pistols, with shining handles, stuck into his jacket, were the only military signs he bore at this moment. But in spite of his placid, good-humored face, Maître Jacques was really the leader of the boldest band in the whole region, and the most determined Chouan to be found in a circuit of fifty miles, throughout which he enjoyed a very formidable reputation.

Maître Jacques had never seriously laid down his arms during the whole fifteen years that Napoleon's power lasted. With two or three men--oftener alone and isolated--he had managed to make head against whole brigades detailed to capture him. His courage and his luck were something supernatural, and gave rise to an idea among the superstitious population of the Bocage that his life was invulnerable, and that the balls of the Blues were harmless against him. When, therefore, after the revolution of July, in fact, during the very first days of August, 1830, Maître Jacques announced that he should take the field, all the refractories of the neighborhood flocked to his standard, and it was not long before he had under his orders a considerable body of men, with whom he had already begun the second series of his guerilla exploits.

After asking Aubin Courte-Joie to excuse him for a few moments, Maître Jacques, who, for the purposes of conversation had put first his head and then his bust above the trapdoor, now stooped down into the opening, and gave a curiously modulated whistle. At this signal a hum arose from the bowels of the earth, much like that of a hive of bees. Then, close by, between two bushes, a wide sort of lid or skylight, covered only with turf and moss and dried leaves, exactly like the ground beside it, rose vertically, supported on four stakes at the four corners. As it rose it revealed the opening to a sort of grain-pit, very broad and very deep; and from this pit about twenty men now issued, one after another, in succession.

The dress of these men had nothing of the elegant picturesqueness which

characterizes brigands as we see them issue from pasteboard caverns at the Opéra-Comique,--far, very far from that. Some wore uniforms which closely resembled the rags on Trigaud-Vermin's person; others--and these were the most elegant--wore cloth jackets. But the jackets of the greater number were of cotton.

The same diversity existed in their weapons. Two or three regulation muskets, half a dozen sporting guns, and as many pistols formed the entire equipment of firearms. The display of side-arms was far from being as respectable; it consisted solely of Maître Jacques's sabre, two pikes dating back to the old war, and eight or ten scythes, carefully sharpened by their owners.

When all the braves had issued from the pit into the clearing. Maître Jacques walked up to the trunk of a felled tree, on which he sat down. Trigaud placed Aubin Courte-Joie beside him, after which the giant retired a few steps, though still within reach of his partner's signals.

"Yes, my Courte-Joie," said Maître Jacques, "the wolves are after us; but it gives me pleasure to have you take the trouble to come and warn me." Then, suddenly, "Ah, ça!" he cried; "how happens it that you can come? I thought you were caught when they took Jean Oullier? Jean Oullier got away, I know, as they crossed the ford,--there's nothing surprising in his escape; but you, my poor footless one,--how, in Heaven's name, did you get off?"

"You forget Trigaud's feet," replied Aubin Courte-Joie, laughing. "I pricked the gendarme who held me, and it seems it hurt him, for he let go of me, and my friend Trigaud did the rest. But who told you that, Maître Jacques?"

"Maître Jacques shrugged his shoulders with an indifferent air. Then, without replying to the question, which he may have thought an idle one,--

"Ah, ça!" he said; "I hope you haven't come to tell me that the day is changed?"

"No; it is still for the 24th."

"That's good," replied Maître Jacques; "for the fact is I've lost all patience with their

delays and their shufflings. Good Lord! where's the need of such a fuss to pick up one's gun, say good-bye to one's wife, and be off?"

"Patience! patience! you won't have long to wait now, Maître Jacques."

"Four days!" said the other, in a tone of disgust.

"That's not long."

"I think it is too long by three. I didn't have Jean Oullier's chance to do for some of them at the springs of Baugé."

"Yes; the gars told me about that."

"Unhappily," continued Maître Jacques, "they have taken a cruel revenge for it."

"How so?"

"Haven't you heard?"

"No; I have just come straight from Montaigu."

"Ah, true; then you can't know."

"What happened?"

"They caught and killed in Pascal Picaut's house a fine young man I respected,--I, who don't think any too much of his class usually."

"What was his name?"

"Comte de Bonneville."

"Did they really? When was it?"

"Why this very day, damn it! about two in the afternoon."

"How, in the devil's name, did you hear that, down in your pit, Maître Jacques?"

"Don't I hear everything that is of use to me?"

"Then I don't know that there's any use in my telling you what brings me here."

"Why not?"

"Because you probably know it."

"That may be."

"I should like to be sure whether you do or not."

"Pooh!"

"Faith! yes, I should. It would spare me a disagreeable errand, which I only accepted against my will."

"Ah! then you have come from those gentlemen?"

Maître Jacques pronounced the words we have underscored in a tone that varied from contempt to menace.

"Yes, I do, in the first instance," replied Aubin Courte-Joie; "but I met Jean Oullier on my way, and he, too, gave me a message for you."

"Jean Oullier! Ah! anything that comes from him is welcome. He is a gars I love,--Jean Oullier! He has done a thing in his life which made me his friend forever."

"What was that?"

"That's his secret, not mine. But come; tell me, in the first place, what those lordly gentlemen want of me?"

"It is your division leader who has sent me."

"The Marquis de Souday?"

"Yes."

"Well, what does he want?"

"He complains that you attract, by your constant sorties, the attention of the government soldiers, and that you irritate the population of the towns by your exactions, and also that you paralyze the general movement by making it more difficult."

"Pooh! why haven't they made their movement sooner? We have waited long enough, God knows! For my part, I've been waiting since July 30."

"And then--"

"What! is there any more of it?"

"Yes; he orders you--"

"Orders me!"

"Wait a moment; you can obey or not obey, but he orders you--"

"Listen to me, Courte-Joie; whatever he orders I here make a vow to disobey it. Now, go on; I'm listening."

"Well, he orders you to stay quietly in your quarters till the 24th, and, above all, to stop no diligence nor any traveller on the high-road, as you have been doing lately."

"Well, I swear, for my part," replied Maître Jacques, "to capture the first person that goes to-night from Légé to Saint-Étienne or from Saint-Étienne to Légé. As for you, stay here, gars Courte-Joie, and then you can tell him what you have seen."

"Oh, no! no!" exclaimed Aubin.

"Why not?"

"Don't do that, Maître Jacques."

"Yes, by God! I will, though."

"Jacques! Jacques!" insisted the tavern-keeper; "can't you see it will compromise our sacred cause?"

"Possibly; but it will prove to him--that old fox I never chose for my superior--that I and my men are outside his division, and that here, at least, his orders shall never be obeyed. So much for the orders of the Marquis de Souday; now go on to Jean Oullier's message."

"I met him as I reached the heights near the bridge at Servières. He asked where I

was going, and when I told him, 'Parbleu!' said he; 'that's the very thing! Ask Maître Jacques if he can move out and let us have his earth-hole for some one we want to hide there.'"

"Ah, ha! Did he say who the person was, my Courte-Joie?"

"No."

"Never mind! Whoever it is, if he comes in the name of Jean Oullier, he'll be welcome; for I know Jean Oullier wouldn't turn me out if it were not for some good reason. He is not one of the crowd of lazy lords who make all the noise and leave us to do the work."

"Some are good, and some are bad," said Aubin, philosophically.

"When is the person he wants to hide coming?" asked Maître Jacques.

"To-night."

"How shall I know him?"

"Jean Oullier will bring him."

"Good. Is that all he wants?"

"No; he wishes you to capture all doubtful persons in the forest to-night, and have the whole neighborhood watched, more especially the path toward Grand-Lieu."

"There now! just see that! The division commander orders me to arrest no one, and Jean Oullier wants me to clear the forest of curs and red-breeches,--reason the more why I should keep the oath I made just now. How will Jean Oullier know that I shall be expecting him?"

"If he can come--that is, if there are no troops in the way at Touvois--I am to let him know."

"Yes; but how?"

"By a branch of holly with fifteen leaves upon it in the middle of the road half-way along to Machecoul, at the crossways of Benaste, the tip end turned toward

Touvois."

"Did he give you the password? Jean Oullier would surely not forget that."

"Yes; 'Vanquished' and 'Vendée.'"

"Very good," said Maître Jacques, rising and going to the middle of the open. There he called four of his men, gave them some directions in a low voice, and all four, without replying, went off in four different directions. At the end of about four minutes, during which time Maître Jacques had ordered up a jug of what seemed to be brandy, and had offered some to his companion, four individuals appeared from the four directions in which the other men had been sent. These were the sentinels just relieved by their comrades.

"Any news?" asked Maître Jacques.

"No," replied three of the men.

"Good. You,--what do you say?" he inquired of the fourth. "You had the best post."

"The diligence to Nantes was escorted by four gendarmes."

"Ah, ha! your nose is good; you smell specie. Bless me! and when I think there are those who order us not to get it! However, friends, patience! we are not to be put down."

"Well, what do you think?" interrupted Courte-Joie.

"I think there's not a pair of red breeches anywhere about. Tell Jean Oullier he can bring his people."

"Good!" said Courte-Joie, who during this examination of the sentries was preparing a branch of holly in the manner agreed upon with Jean Oullier. "Very good; I'll send Trigaud." Turning toward the giant, "Here, Vermin!" he said.

Maître Jacques stopped him.

"Ah, ça!" he exclaimed; "are you crazy, to part with your legs in that way? Suppose you should need him? Nonsense! there are forty men here who would like no better

than to stretch their legs. Wait, you shall see--Hi! Joseph Picaut!"

At the call, our old acquaintance, who was sleeping on the grass in a sleep he seemed much to need, sat up and listened.

"Joseph Picaut!" repeated Maître Jacques, impatiently.

That decided the man. He rose, grumbling, and went up to Maître Jacques.

"Here is a branch of holly," said the leader of the belligerents; "don't pluck off a single leaf. Carry it immediately to the crossway of La Benaste on the road to Machecoul, and lay it down in front of the crucifix, with its tip-end pointing toward Touvois."

Maître Jacques crossed himself as he said the word "crucifix."

"But--" began Picaut, objecting.

"But?--what do you mean?"

"I mean that, after four hours of such a run as I have just made, my legs are breaking under me."

"Joseph Picaut," replied Maître Jacques, whose voice grew strident and metallic, like the blare of a trumpet, "you left your parish and enrolled yourself in my band. You came here; I did not ask you. Now, recollect one thing: at the first objection I strike; at the second I kill."

As he spoke Maître Jacques pulled a pistol from his jacket, grasped it by the barrel, and struck a vigorous blow with the butt-end on Picaut's head. The shock was so violent that the peasant, quite bewildered, came down on one knee. Probably, without the protection of his hat, which was made of thick felt, his skull would have been fractured.

"And now, go!" said Maître Jacques, calmly looking to see if the blow had shaken the powder from the pan.

Without a word Joseph Picaut picked himself up, shook his head, and went off.

Courte-Joie watched him till he was out of sight; then he looked at Maître Jacques.

"Do you allow such fellows as that in your band?" he said.

"Yes; don't speak of it!"

"Have you had him long?"

"No, only a few hours."

"Bad recruit for you."

"I don't say that exactly. He is a brave gars, like his father, whom I knew well; only, he has to be taught to obey like my fellows, and to get used to the ways of the burrow. He'll improve; he'll improve."

"Oh, I don't doubt it! You have a wonderful way of educating them."

"God bless me! I've been at it a good while! But," continued Maître Jacques, "it is time for my round of inspection, and I shall have to leave you, my poor Courte-Joie. It is understood, isn't it, that Jean Oullier's friends are welcome to the burrow. As for the division commander, he shall have his answer to-night. You are sure that is all gars Oullier told you to say?"

"Yes."

"Rummage your memory."

"I am sure that is all."

"Very well. If the burrow suits him, he shall have it,--he and his friends. I don't bother myself about my gars; those scamps, they are like mice,--they have more than one hole. Good-bye for the present, gars Aubin; and while you are waiting, take a bite. I see them making ready for a stew down there."

Maître Jacques descended into what he called his burrow. Then he came out a moment later, armed with a carbine, the priming of which he examined with the utmost care; after which he disappeared among the trees.

The open was now very animated, and presented a most picturesque effect. A large

fire had been lighted in the burrow, and the glare coming through the trap illumined the trees and bushes with fantastic gleams. The supper of the men, who were scattered about the open, was cooking at it, while the men waited. Some, on their knees, were telling their beads; others, sitting down, sang in low tones those national songs whose plaintive, long-drawn melodies were so in keeping with the character of the landscape. Two Bretons, lying on their stomachs at the mouth of the burrow, were betting, by means of two bones of different shades of color, for the possession of sundry copper coins, while another gars (who, from his pallid face and shrivelled skin,--shrivelled with fever,--was obviously a dweller among the marshes) employed himself, without much success, in cleaning a thick coat of rust from the barrel and match-lock of an old carbine.

Aubin Courte-Joie, accustomed to such scenes, paid no attention to the one before him. Trigaud had made him a sort of couch with leaves, and he was now seated on this improvised mattress, smoking his pipe as tranquilly as if in his tavern at Montaigu.

Suddenly he fancied he heard in the far distance the well-known cry of alarm,--the cry of the screech-owl,--but modulated in a certain long-drawn-out way which indicated danger. Courte-Joie whistled softly to warn the men about him to keep silence and listen; but almost at the same instant a shot echoed from a place about a thousand steps distant.

In the twinkling of an eye the water-pails, standing ready for this very use, had put out the fire; the roof was lowered, the trap closed, and Maître Jacques's belligerents, among them Courte-Joie, whom his physical partner remounted on his shoulders, were scattering in every direction among the trees, where they awaited the next signal from their leader.

XLV.

THE DANGER OF MEETING BAD COMPANY IN THE WOODS.

It was nearly seven o'clock in the evening when Petit-Pierre, accompanied by Baron Michel, now her guide in place of poor Bonneville, left the cottage where she had escaped such dangers.

It was not, as we can readily believe, without a deep and painful emotion that Petit-Pierre crossed that threshold and left the cold, inanimate body of the chivalrous young man, whom she had known for a few days only, but already loved as an old and trusted friend. That valiant heart of hers had a momentary sense of weakness at the thought of meeting alone the perils that for four or five days poor Bonneville had shared with her. The royal cause had only lost one soldier, yet Petit-Pierre felt as though an army was gone.

It was the first grain of the bloody seed about to be sown once more in the soil of La Vendée; and Petit-Pierre asked herself in anguish if, indeed, nothing would come of it but regret and mourning.

Petit-Pierre did not insult Marianne Picaut by charging her to take good care of the body of poor Bonneville. Strange as the ideas of that woman may have seemed to her, she understood the nobility of her feelings, and recognized all that was truly good and profoundly religious beneath her rough exterior. When Michel brought his horse to the door and reminded Petit-Pierre that every moment was precious, the latter turned to the widow of Pascal Picaut, and holding out her hand, said:

"How can I thank you for all you have done for me?"

"I have done nothing for you," replied Marianne; "I have paid a debt,--fulfilled an oath, that is all."

"Then," said Petit-Pierre, with tears in her eyes, "you will not even accept my gratitude?"

"If you are determined to owe me something," said the widow, "do this: when you pray for those who are dead add to your prayers a few words for those who have died because of you."

"Then you think I have some credit with God?" said Petit-Pierre, unable to keep from smiling through her tears.

"Yes; because I know that you are destined to suffer."

"At least, you will accept this," said Petit-Pierre, unfastening from her throat a little medal hanging to a slender black silk cord. "It is only silver, but the Holy Father blessed it in my presence, and said when he gave it to me that God would grant the prayers uttered over it, if they were just and pious."

Marianne took the medal. Then she said:--

"Thank you. On this medal I will pray to God that our land be saved from civil war, and that He will ever preserve its grandeur and its liberty."

"Right!" said Petit-Pierre; "the last half of your prayer will be echoed in mine."

Aided by Michel, she mounted the horse which the young man led by the bridle, and with a last signal of farewell to the widow, they both disappeared behind the hedge.

For some minutes Petit-Pierre, whose head was bowed on her breast, swayed to the motions of the horse and seemed to be buried in deep and painful reflections. At last, however, she made an effort over herself, and shaking off the grief that overcame her, she turned to Michel, who was walking beside her.

"Monsieur," she said, "I already know two things which entitle you to my confidence: first, that we owed the warning that troops were surrounding the château de Souday to you; second, that you have come to me to-day in the name of the marquis and his charming daughters. But there is still a third thing, about which I should like to know, and that is, who you are. My friends are rare under present circumstances, and I like to know their names that I may promise not to forget them."

"I am called Baron Michel de la Logerie," replied the young man.

"De la Logerie! Surely this is not the first time I have heard that name?"

"Very likely not, Madame," said the young man; "for our poor Bonneville told me he was taking your Highness to my mother--"

"Stop, stop! what are you saying? Your Highness! There is no highness here; I see only a poor little peasant-lad named Petit-Pierre."

"Ah, true; but Madame will excuse--"

"What! again?"

"Pardon me. Our poor Bonneville was taking you to my mother when I had the honor of meeting and conducting you to Souday."

"So that I am under a triple obligation to you. That does not disquiet me; for, great as your services have been, I hope the time will come when I can discharge my debt."

Michel stammered a few words, which did not reach the ears of his companion. But the latter's words seemed to have made an impression on him; for from that moment, while obeying the injunction to refrain from a certain deference, he redoubled his care and attention to the personage he was guiding.

"But it seems to me," said Petit-Pierre, after a moment's thought, "from what Monsieur de Bonneville told me, that royalist opinions are not altogether those of your family."

"No, they are not, Ma--mon--"

"Call me Petit-Pierre, or do not call me anything; that is the only way to avoid embarrassment. So it is to a conversion that I owe the honor of having you for my knight?"

"An easy conversion! At my age opinions are not convictions; they are only sentiments."

"You are indeed very young," said Petit-Pierre, looking at her guide.

"I am nearly twenty-one."

Petit-Pierre gave a sigh.

"That is the fine age," she said, "for love or war."

The young man heaved a deep sigh, and Petit-Pierre, who heard it, smiled imperceptibly.

"Ah!" she said; "there's a sigh which tells me many things about the conversion we were speaking of just now. I will wager that a pretty pair of eyes knows something about it, and that if the soldiers of Louis-Philippe were to search you at this moment they would find a scarf that is dearer to you for the hands that embroidered it than for the principles of which its color is the emblem."

"I assure you, Madame," stammered Michel, "that is not the cause of my determination."

"Come, come, don't defend yourself; all that is true chivalry, Monsieur Michel. We must never forget, whether we descend from them or whether we seek to emulate them, that the knights of old placed women next to God and on the level of kings, combining all three in one device. Do not be ashamed of loving! Why, that is your greatest claim to my sympathy! Ventre-saint-gris! as Henri IV. would have said; with an army of twenty thousand lovers I could conquer not only all France, but the world! Come, tell me the name of your lady, Monsieur le Baron de la Logerie."

"Oh!" exclaimed Michel, deeply shocked.

"Ah! I see you are discreet, young man. I congratulate you; it is a quality all the more precious because in these days it is so rare. But never mind; to a travelling-companion we tell all, charging him to keep our secret inviolably. Come, shall I help you? I will wager that we are now going toward the lady of our thoughts."

"You are right there."

"And I will further wager that she is neither more nor less than one of those

charming amazons at Souday."

"Good heavens! who could have told you?"

"Well, I congratulate you again, my young friend. Wolves as I am told some persons call them, I know they have brave and noble hearts, capable of bestowing happiness on the husbands they select. Are you rich, Monsieur de la Logerie?"

"Alas, yes!" replied Michel.

"So much the better, and not alas at all! You can enrich your wife, and that seems to me a great happiness. In all cases, in all loves, there are certain little difficulties to overcome, and if Petit-Pierre can help you at any time you have only to call upon him; he will be most happy to recognize in that way the services you have been good enough to render him. But, if I'm not mistaken, here comes some one toward us. Listen; don't you hear a tread?"

The steps of a man now became distinctly audible. They were still at some distance, but were coming nearer.

"I think the man is alone," said Petit-Pierre.

"Yes; but we must not be the less on our guard," replied the baron. "I shall ask your permission to mount that horse in front of you."

"Willingly; but are you already tired?"

"No, not at all. Only, I am well known in the neighborhood, and if I were seen on foot leading a horse on which a peasant was riding, as Haman led Mordecai, it might give rise to a good deal of speculation."

"Bravo! what you say is very true. I begin to think we shall make something of you in the end."

Petit-Pierre jumped to the ground. Michel mounted; and Petit-Pierre placed herself humbly behind him. They were hardly settled in their seats before they came within thirty yards of an individual who was walking in their direction, and whose steps

now ceased abruptly.

"Oh! oh!" said Petit-Pierre; "it seems that if we are afraid of him, he is afraid of us."

"Who's there?" called Michel, making his voice gruff.

"Ah! is it you, Monsieur le baron?" replied the man, advancing. "The devil take me if I expected to meet you here at this hour!"

"You told the truth when you said that you were well known," whispered Petit-Pierre, laughing.

"Yes, unfortunately," said Michel, in a tone which warned Petit-Pierre they were in presence of a real danger.

"Who is this man?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"Courtin, my farmer,--the one we suspect of denouncing your presence at Marianne Picaut's." Then he added, in a vehement and imperative tone, which made his companion aware of the urgency of the situation, "Hide behind me as much as possible."

Petit-Pierre immediately obeyed.

"Oh! it is you Courtin, is it?" said Michel.

"Yes, it is I," replied the farmer.

"Where do you come from?" asked Michel.

"From Machecoul; I went there to buy an ox."

"Where is your ox? I don't see it."

"No, I couldn't make a trade. These damned politics hinder business, and there's nothing now in the market," said Courtin, who was carefully examining, as well as he could in the darkness, the horse on which the young baron was mounted.

Then, as Michel dropped the conversation, he continued:--

"But how is it you are turning your back to La Logerie at this time of night?"

"That's not surprising; I am going to Souday."

"Might I observe that you are not altogether on the road to Souday?"

"I know that; but I was afraid the road was guarded, so I have made a circuit."

"In that case,--I mean if you are really going to Souday," said Courtin,--"I think I ought to give you a bit of advice."

"Well, give it; sincere advice is always useful."

"Don't go; the cage is empty."

"Pooh!"

"Yes, I tell you, it is empty; there's no use in your going there, Monsieur le baron, to find the bird who has sent you scouring the country."

"Who told you that, Courtin?" said Michel, man[oe]uvring his horse so as to keep his body well before Courtin, and thus mask Petit-Pierre behind him.

"Who told me? Hang it! my eyes told me; I saw them all file out of the courtyard, the devil take them! They marched right past me on the road to Grandes-Landes."

"Were the soldiers in that direction?" asked the young baron.

Petit-Pierre thought this question rash, and she pinched Michel's arm.

"Soldiers!" replied Courtin; "why should you be afraid of soldiers? But if you are, I advise you not to risk yourself at this time of night on the plain. You can't go three miles without coming plump on bayonets. Do a wiser thing than that, Monsieur Michel."

"What do you advise me to do? Come, if your way is better than mine, I'll take it."

"Go back with me to La Logerie; you will give your mother great satisfaction, for she is fretting herself to death over the way you are behaving."

"Maître Courtin," said Michel, "I'll give you a bit of advice in exchange."

"What's that, Monsieur le baron?"

"To hold your tongue."

"No, I cannot hold my tongue," replied the farmer, assuming an appearance of sorrowful emotion,--"no, it grieves me too much to see my young master exposed to such dangers, and all for--"

"Hush, Courtin!"

"For those cursed she-wolves whom the son of a peasant like myself would have none of."

"Wretch! will you be silent?" cried Michel, raising his whip.

The action, which Courtin had no doubt tried to provoke, caused Michel's horse to give a jump forward, and the mayor of La Logerie was now abreast of the two riders.

"I am sorry if I've offended you, Monsieur le baron," he said, in a whining tone. "Forgive me; but I haven't slept for two nights thinking about it."

Petit-Pierre shuddered. She heard the same false and wheedling voice that had spoken to her in the cottage of the Widow Picaut, followed, after the speaker's departure, by such painful events. She made Michel another sign, by which she meant, "Let us get rid of this man at any cost."

"Very good," said Michel; "go your way and let us go ours."

Courtin pretended to notice for the first time that Michel had some one behind him.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed. "Why, you are not alone! Ah! I see now, Monsieur le baron, why you were so touchy about what I said. Well, monsieur," he said, addressing Petit-Pierre, "whoever you are, I am sure you will be more reasonable than your young friend. Join me in telling him there is nothing to be gained by braving the laws and the power of the government, as he is bent on doing to please those wolves."

"Once more, Courtin," said Michel, in a tone that was actually menacing, "I tell you

to go. I act as I think best, and I consider you very insolent to presume to judge of my conduct."

But Courtin, whose smooth persistency we all know by this time, seemed determined not to depart without getting a look at the features of the mysterious personage whom his young master had behind him.

"Come," he said; "to-morrow you can do as you like; but to-night, at least, come and sleep at the farmhouse,--you and the person, lady or gentleman, who is with you. I swear to you, Monsieur le baron, that there is danger in being out to-night."

"There is no danger for myself and my companion, for we are not concerned in politics. What are you doing to my saddle, Courtin?" asked the young man suddenly, noticing a movement on his farmer's part which he did not understand.

"Why, nothing, Monsieur Michel; nothing," said Courtin, with perfect good-humor. "So then, you positively won't listen to my advice and entreaties?"

"No; go your way, and let me go mine."

"Go, then!" exclaimed the farmer, in his sly, sarcastic tone; "and God be with you. Remember that poor Courtin did what he could to prevent you from rushing into danger."

So saying, Courtin finally drew aside, and Michel, setting spurs to his horse, rode past him.

"Gallop! gallop!" cried Petit-Pierre. "That is the man who caused poor Bonneville's death. Let us get on as fast as we can; that man has the evil-eye."

The young baron stuck both spurs into his horse; but the animal had hardly gone a dozen paces before the saddle turned, and both riders came heavily to the ground. Petit-Pierre was up first.

"Are you hurt?" she asked Michel, who was getting up more slowly.

"No," he replied; "but I am wondering how--"

"How we came to fall? That's not the question. We did fall, and there's the fact. Girth your horse again, and as fast as possible."

"Aïe!" cried Michel, who had already thrown the saddle over his horse's back; "both girths are broken at precisely the same height."

"Say they are cut," said Petit-Pierre. "It is a trick of your infernal Courtin; and it is a warning of worse--Wait, look over there."

Michel, whose arm Petit-Pierre had seized, looked in the direction to which she pointed, and there, about a mile distant in the valley, he saw three or four camp-fires shining in the darkness.

"It is a bivouac," said Petit-Pierre. "If that scoundrel suspects the truth--and no doubt he does--he will make for the camp and set those red-breeches on our traces."

"Ah! do you think that knowing I am with you, I, his master, he would dare--"

"I must suppose everything, Monsieur Michel, and I must risk nothing."

"You are right; we must leave nothing to chance."

"Hadn't we better leave the beaten path?"

"I was thinking of that."

"How much time will it take to go on foot to the place where the marquis is awaiting us?"

"An hour, at least; and we have no time to lose. But what shall we do with the horse? He can't climb the banks as we must."

"Throw the bridle on his neck. He'll go back to his stable; and if our friends meet the animal on the way, they'll know some accident has happened and will come in search of us. Hush! hush!"

"What is it?"

"Don't you hear something?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"Yes; horses' feet in the direction of that bivouac."

"You see it was not without a motive that your farmer cut our saddle-girths. Let us be off, my poor baron."

"But if we leave the horse here those who search for us will know the riders are not far off."

"Stop!" said Petit-Pierre; "I have an idea, an Italian idea!--the races of the barberi. Yes, that's the very thing. Do as I do, Monsieur Michel."

"Go on; I obey."

Petit-Pierre set to work. With her delicate hands, and at the risk of lacerating them, she broke off branches of thorn and holly from the neighboring hedge. Michel did the same, and they presently had two thick and prickly bundles of short sticks.

"What's to be done with them?" asked Michel.

"Tear the name off your handkerchief and give me the rest."

Michel obeyed. Petit-Pierre tore the handkerchief into two strips and tied up the bunches. Then she fastened one to the mane, the other to the tail of the horse. The poor animal, feeling the thorns like spurs upon his flesh, began to rear and plunge. The young baron now began to understand.

"Take off his bridle," said Petit-Pierre, "or he may break his neck; and let him go."

The horse was hardly relieved of the saddle that held him before he snorted, shook his mane and tail angrily, and darted away like a tornado, leaving a trail of sparks behind him.

"Bravo!" cried Petit-Pierre. "Now, pick up the saddle and bridle, and let us find shelter ourselves."

They jumped the hedge, Michel having thrown the saddle and bridle before him. There they crouched down and listened. The gallop of the horse still resounded on the stony road.

"Do you hear it?" said the baron, satisfied.

"Yes; but we are not the only ones who are listening to it, Monsieur le baron," said Petit-Pierre. "Hear the echo."

XLVI.

MAÎTRE JACQUES PROCEEDS TO KEEP THE OATH HE MADE TO AUBIN COURTE-JOIE.

The sound which Baron Michel and Petit-Pierre now heard in the direction by which Courtin had left them changed presently into a loud noise approaching rapidly; and two minutes later a dozen chasseurs, riding at a gallop in pursuit of the trail, or rather the noise made by the running horse, which was snorting and neighing as it ran, passed like a flash, not ten steps from Petit-Pierre and her companion, who, rising slightly after the horsemen had passed, watched their wild rush into the distance.

"They ride well," said Petit-Pierre; "but I doubt if they catch up with that horse."

"They are making straight for the place where our friends are awaiting us, and I think the marquis is in just the humor to put a stop to their course."

"Then it is battle!" cried Petit-Pierre. "Well, water yesterday, fire to-day; for my part, I prefer the latter."

And she tried to hurry Michel in the direction where the fight would take place.

"No, no, no!" said Michel, resisting; "I entreat you not to go there."

"Don't you wish to win your spurs under the eyes of your lady, baron? She is there, you know."

"I think she is," said the young man, sadly. "But troops are scattered over the country in every direction; at the first shots they will all converge toward the firing. We may fall in with one of their detachments, and if, unfortunately, the mission with which I am charged should end disastrously I shall never dare to appear again before

the marquis--"

"Say before his daughter."

"Well, yes,--before his daughter."

"Then, in order not to bring trouble into your love affairs I consent to obey you."

"Oh, thank you! thank you!" cried Michel, seizing Petit-Pierre's hand vehemently. Then perceiving the impropriety of his action, he exclaimed, stepping backward, "Oh, pardon me; pray, pardon me!"

"Never mind," said Petit-Pierre; "don't think of it. Where did the Marquis de Souday intend to shelter me?"

"In a farmhouse of mine."

"Not that of your man Courtin, I hope?"

"No, in another, perfectly isolated, hidden in the woods beyond Légé. You know the village where Tinguy lived?"

"Yes; but do you know the way there?"

"Perfectly."

"I distrust that adverb in France. My poor Bonneville said he knew the way perfectly, but he lost it." Petit-Pierre sighed as she added, in a lower tone, "Poor Bonneville! alas! it may have been that very mistake that led to his death."

The topic brought back the melancholy thoughts that filled her mind as she left the cottage where the catastrophe that cost her the life of her first companion had taken place. She was silent, and after making a gesture of consent, she followed her new guide, replying only by monosyllables to the few remarks which Michel addressed to her.

As for the latter, he performed his new functions with more ability and success than might have been expected of him. He turned to the left, and crossing some fields, reached a brook where he had often fished for shrimps in his childhood. This brook

runs through the valley of the Benaste from end to end, rises toward the south and falls again toward the north, where it joins the Boulogne near Saint-Colombin. Either bank, bordered with fields, gave a safe and easy path to pedestrians. Michel took to the brook itself, and followed it for some distance, carrying Petit-Pierre on his shoulders as poor Bonneville had done.

Presently, leaving the brook after following it for about a kilometre, he bore again to the left, crossed the brow of a hill, and showed Petit-Pierre the dark masses of the forest of Touvois, which were visible in the dim light, looming up from the foot of the hill on which they now stood.

"Is that where your farmhouse is?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"We have still to cross the forest," he said; "but we shall get there in about three quarters of an hour."

"You are not afraid of losing your way?"

"No; for we do not have to plunge into the thicket. In fact, we shall not enter the wood at all till we reach the road from Machecoul to Légé. By skirting the edge of the forest to the eastward we must strike that road soon."

"And then?"

"Then all we have to do is to follow it."

"Well, well," said Petit-Pierre, cheerfully, "I'll give a good account of you, my young guide; and faith, it shall not be Petit-Pierre's fault if you don't obtain the reward you covet! But here is rather a well-beaten path. Isn't this the one you are looking for?"

"I can easily tell," replied Michel, "for there ought to be a post on the right--There! here it is! we are all right. And now, Petit-Pierre, I can promise you a good night's rest."

"Ah! that is a comfort," said Petit-Pierre, smiling; "for I don't deny that the terrible

emotions of the day have not relieved the fatigues of last night."

The words were hardly out of her lips before a black outline rose from the other side of the ditch, bounded into the road, and a man seized Petit-Pierre violently by the collar of the peasant's jacket which she wore, crying out in a voice of thunder:--

"Stop, or you're a dead man!"

Michel sprang to the assistance of his young companion by bringing down a vigorous blow with the butt-end of his whip on her assailant. He was near paying dear for his intervention. The man, without letting go of Petit-Pierre, whom he held with his left arm, drew a pistol from his jacket and fired at the young baron. Happily for the latter, in spite of Petit-Pierre's feebleness she was not of a stuff to keep as passive as her captor expected. With a rapid gesture she struck the arm that fired the weapon, and the ball, which would otherwise have gone straight to Michel's breast, only wounded him in the shoulder. He returned to the charge, and their assailant was just pulling a second pistol from his belt when two other men sprang from the bushes and seized Michel from behind.

Then the first assailant, seeing that the young man could interfere no longer, contented himself by saying to his companions:--

"Secure that fellow first; and then come and rid me of this one."

"But," said Petit-Pierre, "by what right do you stop us in this way?"

"This right," said the man, striking the carbine, which he carried on his shoulder. "If you want to know why, you will find out presently. Bind that man securely," he said to his men. "As for this one," he added contemptuously, "it isn't worth while; I think there'll be no trouble in mastering him."

"But I wish to know where you are taking us," insisted Petit-Pierre.

"You are very inquisitive, my young friend," replied the man.

"But--"

"Damn it! come on, and you'll find out. You shall see with your own eyes where you are going in a very few minutes."

And the man, taking Petit-Pierre by the arm, dragged her into the bushes, while Michel, struggling violently, was pushed by the two assistants in the same direction.

They walked thus for about ten minutes, at the end of which time they reached the open where, as we know, was the burrow of Maître Jacques and his bandits. For it was he, bent on sacredly keeping his oath to Aubin Courte-Joie, who had stopped the two travellers whom luck had sent in his way; and it was his pistol-shot which, as we have already seen at the close of a preceding chapter, put the whole camp of the refractories on the qui vive.

END OF VOL I.

THE LAST VENDÉE;
OR,

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL.

VOLUME II.

THE LAST VENDÉE;
OR,

THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL.

I.

IN WHICH IT APPEARS THAT ALL JEWS ARE NOT FROM JERUSALEM, NOR ALL TURKS FROM TUNIS.

"Hola! hey! my rabbits!" called Maître Jacques, as he entered the open.

At the voice of their leader the obedient "rabbits" issued from the underbrush and from the tufts of gorse and brambles beneath which they had ensconced themselves at the first alarm, and came running into the open, where they eyed the two prisoners, as well as the darkness would allow, with much curiosity. Then, as if this examination did not suffice, one of them went down into the burrow, lighted two bits of pine, and jumping back put the improvised torches under the nose of Petit-Pierre and that of her companion.

Maître Jacques had resumed his usual seat on the trunk of a tree, and was peaceably conversing with Aubin Courte-Joie, to whom he related the incidents of the capture he had made, with the same circumstantial particularity with which a villager tells his wife of a purchase he has just concluded at a market.

Michel, who was naturally somewhat overcome by the affair and by his wound, was sitting, or rather lying, on the grass. Petit-Pierre, standing beside him, was gazing, with an attention not exempt from disgust, at the faces of the bandits; which was easy to do, because, having satisfied their curiosity, they had gone back to their usual pursuits,--that is to say, to their psalm-singing, their games, their sleep, and the polishing of their weapons. And yet, while playing, drinking, singing, and cleansing their guns, carbines, and pistols, they never lost sight for an instant of the two prisoners who, by way of precaution, were placed in the very centre of the open.

It was then that Petit-Pierre, withdrawing her eyes from the bandits, noticed for the first time that her companion was wounded.

"Oh, good God!" she exclaimed, seeing the blood which had run down Michel's arm to his hand; "you are shot?"

"Yes; I think so, Ma--mon--"

"Oh! for heaven's sake, say Petit-Pierre, and more than ever. Do you suffer much pain?"

"No; I thought I received a blow from a stick on the shoulder, but now the whole

arm is getting numb."

"Try to move it."

"Well, in any case, there is nothing broken. See!"

And he moved his arm with comparative ease.

"Good! This will certainly win you the heart you love, and if your noble conduct is not enough, I promise to intervene in your behalf; and I have good reason to think my intervention will be effectual."

"How kind you are, Ma--Petit-Pierre! And whatever you order me to do, I'll do it after such a promise; even if I have to attack a battery of a hundred guns single-handed, I'll go, head down, to the redoubt. Ah, if you would only speak to the Marquis de Souday for me, I should be the happiest of men!"

"Don't gesticulate in that way; you will prevent the blood from stanching. So it seems it is the marquis you are particularly afraid of. Well, I'll speak to him, your terrible marquis, on the word of--of Petit-Pierre. But now, as they have left us alone to ourselves, let us talk about our present affairs. Where are we?--and who are these persons?"

"To me," said Michel, "they look like Chouans."

"Do Chouans stop inoffensive travellers? Impossible!"

"They do, though."

"I am shocked."

"Well, if they have not done it before, they have done it now, apparently."

"What will they do with us?"

"That we shall soon know; for see, they are beginning to bestir themselves,--about us, no doubt!"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Petit-Pierre; "how odd it will be if we are in danger from my own partisans! But hush!"

Maître Jacques, after conferring for some time with Aubin Courte-Joie, gave the order to bring the prisoners before him.

Petit-Pierre advanced confidently toward the tree, on which the master of the burrow held his assizes; but Michel who, on account of his wound and his bound hands, found some difficulty in getting on his legs, took more time in obeying the order. Seeing this, Aubin Courte-Joie made a sign to Trigaud-Vermin, who, seizing the young man by the waist, lifted him with the ease another man would have had in lifting a child three years old, and placed him before Maître Jacques, taking care to put him in precisely the same attitude from which he had taken him,--a man[oe]uvre Trigaud-Vermin accomplished by swinging forward Michel's lower limbs and poking him in the back before he let him fall at full length on the ground.

"Stupid brute!" muttered Michel, who had lost under the effect of pain some of his natural timidity.

"You are not civil," said Maître Jacques; "no, I repeat to you, Monsieur le Baron Michel de la Logerie, you are not civil, and the kindness of that poor fellow deserved a better return. But come, let's attend to our little business!" Casting a more observing look at the young man, he added, "I am not mistaken; you are M. le Baron Michel de la Logerie, are you not?"

"Yes," replied Michel, laconically.

"Very good. What were you doing on the road to Légé, in the middle of the forest of Touvois at this time of night?"

"I might answer that I am not obliged to give an account of my actions to you, and that the highways are open to everybody."

"But you won't answer me in that way, Monsieur le baron."

"Why not?"

"Because, with due respect to you, it would be folly, and I believe you have too

much sense to commit it."

"Very good; I won't discuss the point. I was going to my farm of Banl[oe]uvre, which, as you know, is at the farther end of the forest of Touvois, in which we now are."

"Well done; that's right, Monsieur le baron. Do me the honor to answer always in that way and we shall agree. Now, how is it that the Baron de la Logerie, who has so many good horses in his stables, so many fine carriages in his coach-house, should be travelling on foot with his friend, like a simple peasant,--like us, in short?"

"We had a horse, but he got away in an accident we met with, and we could not catch him."

"Well done again. Now, Monsieur le baron, I hope you will be kind enough to give us some news."

"I?"

"Yes. What is going on over there, Monsieur le baron?"

"How can things over our way interest you?" asked Michel, who not being quite sure to which party the man he was addressing belonged, hesitated as to the color he ought to give to his replies.

"Go on, Monsieur le baron," resumed Maître Jacques; "never mind whether what you have to say is useful to me or not. Come, bethink yourself. Whom did you meet on the way?"

Michel looked at Petit-Pierre with embarrassment. Maître Jacques intercepted the look, and calling up Trigaud-Vermin, he ordered him to stand between the two prisoners, like the Wall in "Midsummer-Night's Dream."

"Well," continued Michel, "we met what everybody meets at all hours and on every road for the last three days in and about Machecoul,--we met soldiers."

"Did they speak to you?"

"No."

"No? Do you mean to say they let you pass without a word?"

"We avoided them."

"Bah!" said Maître Jacques, in a doubtful tone.

"Travelling on our own business it did not suit us to be mixed up in affairs that were none of ours."

"Who is this young man who is with you?"

Petit-Pierre hastened to answer before Michel had time to do so.

"I am Monsieur le baron's servant," she said.

"Then, my young friend," said Maître Jacques, replying to Petit-Pierre, "allow me to tell you that you are a very bad servant. In fact, peasant as I am, I am grieved to hear a servant answering for his master, especially when no one spoke to him." Turning to Michel, he continued, "So this lad is your servant, is he? Well, he is a pretty boy."

And the lord of the burrow looked at Petit-Pierre with scrutinizing attention, while one of his men threw the light of a torch full on her face to facilitate the examination.

"Let us come to the point," said Michel; "what do you want? If it is my purse I sha'n't prevent you from having it. Take it; but let us go about our business."

"Oh, fie!" returned Maître Jacques; "if I were a gentleman, like you, Monsieur Michel, I would ask satisfaction for such an insult. Do you take us for highwaymen? That's not flattering. I would willingly tell you my business, only, I fear I should make myself disagreeable. Besides, you say you have nothing to do with politics. Your father, nevertheless, whom I knew something of in the olden time, did meddle with politics, and didn't lose his fortune that way either. I must admit, therefore, that I expected to find you a zealous adherent of his Majesty Louis-Philippe."

"Then you'd have been very much mistaken, my good sir," broke in Petit-Pierre,

disrespectfully; "Monsieur le baron is, on the contrary, a zealous partisan of his Majesty Henri V."

"Indeed, my little friend!" cried Maître Jacques. Then, turning to Michel, "Come, Monsieur le baron," he continued, "be frank; is what your companion--I mean your servant--says the truth?"

"The exact truth," answered Michel.

"Ah, but this is good news! I, who thought I had to do with those horrid curs!--good God! how ashamed I am of the way I have treated you, and what excuses I ought to offer! Pray, receive them, Monsieur le baron; and take your share, my excellent young friend,--master and servant, please to accept them together. I'm not too proud to beg your pardon."

"Well, then," said Michel, whose displeasure was not lessened by Maître Jacques's sarcastic politeness, "you have a very easy way of testifying your regret, and that is by letting us go our way."

"Oh, no!" cried Maître Jacques.

"Why not?"

"No, no, no! I cannot consent to let you leave us in that way. Besides, two such partisans of legitimacy as you and I, Monsieur le Baron Michel, have a great deal to say to each other about the grand uprising that is now taking place. Don't you think so, Monsieur le baron?"

"It may be so; but the interests of that cause require that I and my servant should immediately reach the safety of my farm at Banl[oe]uvre."

"Monsieur le baron, there is no spot in all this region as safe as the one where you now are in the midst of us. I cannot allow you to leave us without giving you some proof of the really touching interest I feel for you."

"Hum!" muttered Petit-Pierre, under her breath; "things are going very wrong."

"Go on," said Michel.

"You are devoted to Henri V.?"

"Yes."

"Very devoted?"

"Yes."

"Supremely devoted?"

"I have told you so."

"Yes, you have told me so, and I don't doubt your word. Well, I'll provide you with a way to manifest that devotion in a dazzling manner."

"Do so."

"You see my men," continued Maître Jacques, pointing to his troop,--"some forty scamps who look more like Callot's bandits than the honest peasants that they are. They don't ask anything better than to be killed for our young king and his heroic mother; only, they lack everything needful to attain that end,--shoes to march in, arms to fight with, garments to wear, money to lessen the hardships of the bivouac. You do not, I presume. Monsieur le baron, desire that these faithful servants, accomplishing what you yourself regard as a sacred duty, should be exposed to cold, hunger, and other privations in all weathers?"

"But," said Michel, "how the devil am I to clothe and arm your men? Have I a base of supplies at command?"

"Ah, Monsieur le baron," resumed Maître Jacques, "don't think I know so little of good manners as to dream of burdening you with the annoyance of such details. No, indeed! But I've a faithful follower here" (and he pointed to Aubin Courte-Joie) "who will spare you all trouble. Give him the money, and he will lay it out to the best advantage, all the while saving your purse."

"If that's all," said Michel, with the readiness of youth and the enthusiasm of his

dawning opinions, "I'm very willing. How much do you want?"

"Come, that's good!" exclaimed Maître Jacques, not a little amazed at this readiness. "Well, do you think it would be pushing things too far to ask you for five hundred francs for each man? I should like them to have, besides the uniform,--green, you know, like the chasseurs of Monsieur de Charette,--a knapsack comfortably supplied. Five hundred francs, that's about half the price Philippe charges France for every man she gives him; and each of my men is worth any two of his. You see, therefore, that I am reasonable."

"Say at once the sum you want, and let us make an end of this business at once."

"Well, I have forty men, including those now absent on leave, but who are bound to join the standard at the first call. That makes just twenty thousand francs,--a mere nothing for a rich man like you, Monsieur le baron."

"So be it. You shall have your twenty thousand francs in two days," said Michel, endeavoring to rise; "I give you my word."

"Oh, no, no; I wish to spare you all trouble, Monsieur le baron. You have a friend in this region, a notary, who will advance to you that sum if you write him a pressing little note, a polite little note, which one of my men shall take at once."

"Very well; give me something to write with, and unbind my hands."

"My friend Courte-Joie here has pens, ink, and paper."

Maître Courte-Joie had already begun to pull an inkstand from his pocket. But Petit-Pierre stepped forward.

"One moment, Monsieur Michel," she said, in a resolute tone. "And you, Maître Courte-Joie, as I hear you called, put up your implements. This shall not be done."

"Upon my word!" ejaculated Maître Jacques; "and pray, why not, servant,--as you call yourself?"

"Because such proceedings, monsieur, are those of bandits in Calabria and

Estramadura, and cannot be tolerated among men who claim to be soldiers of King Henri V. Your demand is an actual extortion, which I will not permit."

"You, my young friend?"

"Yes, I."

"If I considered you as being really what you pretend to be, I should treat you as an impertinent lackey; but it strikes me that you have a right to the respect we owe to a woman, and I shall not compromise my reputation for gallantry by handling you roughly. I therefore confine myself, for the present, to telling you to mind your own business and not meddle with what doesn't concern you."

"On the contrary, monsieur, this concerns me very closely," returned Petit-Pierre, with dignity. "It is of the utmost consequence to me that no one shall make use of the name of Henri V. to cover acts of brigandage."

"You take an extraordinary interest in the affairs of his Majesty, my young friend. Will you be good enough to tell me why?"

"Send away your men, and I will tell you, monsieur."

"Off with you to a little distance, my lads!" he said. "It isn't necessary," he continued, as the men obeyed him, "as I have no secrets from those worthy fellows; but I'm willing to humor you, as you see. Come, now we are alone, speak out."

"Monsieur," said Petit-Pierre, going a step nearer to Maître Jacques, "I order you to set that young man at liberty. I require you to give us an escort instantly to the place where we are going, and I also wish you to send in search of the friends we are expecting."

"You require?--you order? Ah, ça! my little turtle-dove, you talk like the king upon his throne. If I refuse, what then?"

"If you refuse I will have you shot within twenty-four hours."

"Upon my word! one would think you were the regent herself."

"I am the regent herself, monsieur."

Maître Jacques burst into a roar of convulsive laughter. His men, hearing his shouts, came up to have their share in the hilarity.

"Ouf!" he cried, seeing them about him; "here's fun! You were amazed enough just now, my lads, weren't you?--to hear a Baron de la Logerie, son of that Michel you wot of, declare that Henri V. had no better friend than he. That was queer enough; but this--oh! this is queerer still, and even more incredible. Here's something that goes beyond the most galloping imagination. Look at this little peasant. You may have taken him for anything you like; but I've supposed him to be nothing else than the mistress of Monsieur le baron. Well, well, my rabbits, we are all mistaken,--you're mistaken; I'm mistaken! This young man whom you see before you is neither more nor less than the mother of our king!"

A growl of ironical incredulity ran through the crowd.

"I swear to you," cried Michel, "it is true."

"Fine testimony, faith!" retorted Maître Jacques.

"I assure you--began Petit-Pierre.

"No, no," interrupted Maître Jacques; "I assure you that if within ten minutes--which I grant to your squire for reflection, my wandering dame--he doesn't do as agreed upon, I'll send him to keep company with the acorns over his head. He may choose, but choose quick,--the money or the rope. If I don't have the one, he'll have the other, that's all!"

"But this is infamous!" cried Petit-Pierre, beside herself.

"Seize her!" said Maître Jacques.

Four men advanced to execute the order.

"Let no one dare to lay a hand on me!" said Petit-Pierre. Then, as Trigaud-Vermin, callous to the majesty of her voice and gesture, still advanced, "What!" she cried,

recoiling from the touch of that brutal hand, and snatching from her head both hat and wig, "Is there no man among those bandits who is soldier enough to recognize me? What! Will God abandon me now to the mercy of such brigands?"

"No!" said a voice behind Maître Jacques; "and I tell this man his conduct is unworthy of one who wears a cockade that is white because it is spotless."

Maître Jacques turned like lightning and aimed a pistol at the new-comer. All the brigands seized their weapons, and it was literally under an arch of iron that Bertha--for it was she--advanced into the circle that surrounded the prisoners.

"The she-wolf!" muttered some of Maître Jacques's men, who knew Mademoiselle de Souday.

"What are you here for?" cried the master of the band. "Don't you know that I refuse to recognize the authority your father arrogates to himself over my troop, and that I positively decline to be a part of his division?"

"Silence, fool!" said Bertha. Then, going straight to Petit-Pierre, and kneeling on one knee before her, "I ask pardon," she said, "for these men who have insulted and threatened you,--you who have so many claims to their respect."

"Ah, faith," cried Petit-Pierre, gayly, "you have come just in time! The situation was getting critical; and here's a poor lad who will owe you his life, for these worthy people were actually talking of hanging him and of sending me to keep him company."

"Good heavens, yes!" said Michel, whom Aubin Courte-Joie, seeing how matters stood, had hastened to unbind.

"And the worst of it was," said Petit-Pierre, laughing and nodding at Michel, "that the young man deserved to live for the favor of a good royalist like yourself."

Bertha smiled and dropped her eyes.

"So," continued Petit-Pierre, "it is you who will have to pay my debts toward him;

and I hope you will not object to my keeping a promise I have made him to speak to your father in his behalf."

Bertha bent low to take the hand of Petit-Pierre and kiss it,--a movement which concealed the rush of color to her cheeks.

Maître Jacques, mortified and ashamed of his mistake, now approached and stammered a few excuses. In spite of her repulsion for the man's brutality, Petit-Pierre knew it would be impolitic to do more than show a certain amount of resentment.

"Your intentions may have been excellent, monsieur," she said, "but your methods are deplorable, and tend to nothing less than making highwaymen of our supporters, like the Company of Jehu in the old war; and I hope you will abstain from such proceedings in future."

Then, turning away, as if such persons no longer existed for her, she said to Bertha, "Now tell me how you happened to come here just at the right moment."

"Your horse smelt his stable-mates," replied the young girl; "we caught him, and then turned aside, for we heard the chasseurs coming up. Seeing the two bundles of thorns tied to the poor beast, we thought that you wanted to be rid of the animal in order to mask your escape, and we all dispersed in different directions to find you, giving ourselves rendezvous at Banl[oe]uvre. I came through the forest; the lights attracted my attention, then the voices. I left my horse at some distance, for fear he might betray me; you know the rest, Madame."

"Very good," said Petit-Pierre; "and now if monsieur will be good enough to give us a guide to Banl[oe]uvre, Bertha, let us start; for, to tell you the truth, I am half-dead with fatigue."

"I will guide you myself, Madame," said Maître Jacques, respectfully.

Petit-Pierre bowed her head in assent; and Maître Jacques busied himself eagerly in his arrangements. Ten men marched in advance to see that the road was clear, while

he himself with ten others escorted Petit-Pierre, who was mounted on Bertha's horse.

Two hours later, as Petit-Pierre, Bertha, and Michel were finishing their supper, the Marquis de Souday and Mary arrived, the former testifying the utmost joy at finding the person whom he called his "young friend" in safety. We must admit that the old gentleman's joy, sincere and genuine as it was, was expressed in the stiff, ceremonious sentences of the old school.

In the course of the evening Petit-Pierre had a long conference with the marquis in a corner of the large hall, which Bertha and Michel watched with deep interest; which was still further deepened when, on the sudden entrance of Jean Oullier, the marquis rose, came up to the young people, and taking Bertha's hand in his, said to Michel:

"Monsieur Petit-Pierre informs me that you aspire to the hand of my daughter Bertha. I may have had other ideas for her establishment, but in consequence of these gracious commands I can only assure you, monsieur, that after the campaign is over my daughter shall be your wife."

A thunderbolt falling at Michel's feet would not have stunned him more. While the marquis ceremoniously prepared to place Bertha's hand in his he turned to Mary, as if to implore her intervention; but her low voice murmured in his ears the terrible words, "I do not love you."

Overwhelmed with grief, bewildered and surprised, Michel mechanically took the hand the marquis presented to him.

II.

MAÎTRE MARC.

The day on which all these events--namely, those in the house of the Widow Picaut, in the château de Souday, the forest of Touvois, and the farmhouse of Banl[oe]uvre--took place, the door of a house, No. 19 rue du Château, at Nantes, opened about five in the afternoon to give exit to two individuals, in one of whom

we may recognize the civil commissioner Pascal, whose acquaintance we have already made at the château de Souday, and who, after leaving it, as we related, with the Duchesse de Berry, poor Bonneville, and the other Vendéan leaders, had returned without difficulty to his official and private residence at Nantes.

The other, and this is the one with whom we are for the present concerned, was a man about forty years of age, with a keen, intelligent, and penetrating eye, a curved nose, white teeth, thick and sensual lips, like those which commonly belong to imaginative persons; his black coat and white cravat and ribbon of the Legion of honor indicated, so far as one might judge by appearances, a man belonging to the magistracy. He was, in truth, one of the most distinguished members of the Paris bar, who had arrived at Nantes the evening before and gone straight to the house of his associate, the civil commissioner. In the royalist vocabulary he bore the name of Marc,--one of the several names of Cicero.

When he reached the street door, conducted, as we have said, by the civil commissioner, he found a cabriolet awaiting him. The two men shook hands affectionately, and the Parisian lawyer got into the vehicle, while the driver, leaning over to the civil commissioner, asked him, as if aware that the traveller was ignorant on the subject:--

"Where am I to take the gentleman?"

"Do you see that peasant at the farther end of the street on a dapple-gray horse?" asked the civil commissioner.

"Yes."

"Then all you have to do is to follow him."

This information was hardly given before the man on the gray horse, as though he had overheard the words of the legitimist agent, started, went down the rue du Château, and turned to the right, so as to keep along by the bank of the river, which flowed to his left. The coachman whipped up his horse, and the squeaking vehicle

on which we have bestowed the unambitious name of "cabriolet," began to rattle over the uneven pavement of the capital of the Loire-Inférieure, following, as best it could, the mysterious guide before it.

Just as it reached the corner of the rue du Château and turned in the direction indicated, the traveller caught sight of the rider, who, without even glancing behind him, began to cross the Loire, by the pont Rousseau, which leads to the high-road of Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu. Once on the road the peasant put his horse to a trot, but a slow trot, such as the cabriolet could easily follow. The rider, however, never turned his head, and seemed not only quite indifferent as to what might be happening behind him, but also so ignorant of the mission he himself was performing that the traveller began to fancy himself the victim of a hoax.

As for the coachman, not being trusted with the secrets of the affair, he could give no information capable of quieting the uneasiness of Maître Marc. Having asked of the civil commissioner, "Where am I to go?" and being told, "Follow the man on the dapple-gray horse," he followed the man on the dapple-gray horse, seeming no more concerned about his guide than his guide was concerned about him.

They reached Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu in about two hours and just at dusk. The man on the gray horse stopped at the inn of the Cygne de la Croix, got off his horse, gave the animal to the hostler, and entered the inn. The traveller in the cabriolet arrived five minutes later and entered the same inn. As he crossed the kitchen the rider met him, and without appearing to take notice of him, slipped a little paper into his hand.

The traveller entered the common room, which happened at the moment to be empty; there he called for a light and a bottle of wine. They brought him what he asked for. He did not touch the bottle, but he opened the note, which contained these words:--

"I will wait for you on the high-road to Légé; follow me, but do not attempt to join

me or speak to me. The coachman will stay at the inn with the cabriolet."

The traveller burned the note, poured himself out a glass of wine, with which he merely wet his lips, told the coachman to stay where he was and expect him on the following evening, and left the inn on foot, without attracting the inn-keeper's attention, or at any rate, without the inn-keeper's attention seeming to be attracted to him.

At the end of the village he saw his man, who was cutting a cane from a hawthorn hedge. The cane being cut, the peasant continued his way, stripping the twigs off the stick as he walked along. Maître Marc followed him for a mile and a half, or thereabout.

By this time it was quite dark, and the peasant entered an isolated house standing on the right of the road. The traveller hastened on and went in almost at the same moment as his guide. No one was there when he reached the threshold except a woman in the room that looked out on the high-road. The peasant was standing before her, apparently awaiting the traveller. As soon as the latter appeared the peasant said to the woman:--

"This is the gentleman to be guided."

Then, having said these words, he went out, not giving time to the traveller he had conducted to reward him with either thanks or money. When the traveller, who followed the man with his eyes, turned his astonished gaze on the mistress of the house, she merely signed to him to sit down, and then without taking further notice of his presence, and without addressing him a single word, she went on with her household avocations.

A silence of half an hour ensued, and the traveller was beginning to get impatient, when the master of the house returned home. Without showing any sign of surprise or curiosity, he bowed to his guest; but he looked at his wife, who repeated, verbatim, the words of the peasant: "This is the gentleman to be guided."

The master of the house then gave the stranger one of those uneasy, shrewd, and rapid glances, which belong exclusively to the Vendéan peasantry. Then, almost immediately, his face resumed its habitual expression, which was one of mingled good-humor and simplicity, as he approached his guest, cap in hand.

"Monsieur wishes to travel through this region?" he said.

"Yes, my friend," replied Maître Marc; "I am desirous of going farther."

"Monsieur has his papers, no doubt?"

"Of course."

"In order?"

"They cannot be more so."

"Under his war name, or his real name?"

"Under my real name."

"I am obliged, in order that I make no mistake, to ask monsieur to show me those papers."

"Is it absolutely necessary?"

"Yes; because until I have seen them I cannot tell monsieur whether he will be absolutely safe in travelling in these parts."

The traveller drew out his passport, which bore date the 28th of February.

"Here they are," he said.

The peasant took the papers, cast his eyes over them to see if the description tallied with the individual before him, refolded the papers, and returned them, saying:--

"It is all right. Monsieur can go everywhere with those papers."

"And will you find some one to guide me?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"I wish to start as soon as possible."

"I will saddle the horses at once."

The master of the house went out. In ten minutes he returned.

"The horses are ready," he said.

"And the guide?"

"He is waiting."

The traveller went out and found a farm-hand already in his saddle, holding another horse by the bridle. Maître Marc perceived that the led horse was intended for his riding, the farm-hand for his guide. In fact, he had scarcely put his foot in the stirrup before his new conductor started, not less silently than his predecessor. It was nine o'clock, and the night was dark.

III.

HOW PERSONS TRAVELLED IN THE DEPARTMENT OF THE LOWER LOIRE IN MAY, 1832.

After riding for an hour and a half, during which time not a word was exchanged between the traveller and his guide, they reached the gate of one of those buildings peculiar to that region, which are something between a farmhouse and a château. The guide stopped, and made a sign to the traveller to do likewise. Then he dismounted and rapped at the door. A servant opened it.

"Here is a gentleman who wishes to speak to monsieur," said the farm-hand.

"It is impossible," replied the servant. "Monsieur has gone to bed."

"Already!" exclaimed the traveller.

The servant came closer.

"Monsieur spent last night at a rendezvous, and has been nearly all day on horseback," he said.

"No matter," said the guide. "This gentleman must see him; he comes from

Monsieur Pascal, and is going to join Petit-Pierre."

"In that case it is different," said the servant. "I will wake monsieur."

"Ask him," said the traveller, "if he can give me a safe guide; a guide is all I want."

"I do not think monsieur would do that," said the servant.

"Why not?"

"Because he will wish to guide monsieur himself," said the man.

He re-entered the house. In five minutes he returned.

"Monsieur wishes to know if monsieur will take anything, or whether he prefers to continue his journey without delay."

"I dined at Nantes and need nothing. I prefer to go on immediately."

The servant again disappeared. A few moments later a young man came out. This time it was not the servant, but the master.

"Under any other circumstances, monsieur," he said, "I should insist on your doing me the honor to rest a while under my roof; but you are no doubt the person whom Petit-Pierre expects from Paris?"

"I am, monsieur."

"Monsieur Marc, then?"

"Yes, Monsieur Marc."

"In that case, let us not lose a moment; you are expected with the utmost impatience." Turning to the farm-hand, he said, "Is your horse fresh?"

"He has only done five miles to-day."

"In that case I'll take him; my horses are all knocked up. Stay here and drink a bottle of wine with Louis. I'll be back in two hours. Louis, take care of your comrade." Then turning to the traveller, he added, "Are you ready, monsieur?"

At an affirmative sign from the latter they started. After a dead silence of a quarter

of an hour a cry sounded about a hundred steps before them. Monsieur Marc started and asked what it was.

"It came from our scout," said the Vendéan leader. "He asks in his fashion if the road is clear. Listen, and you will hear the answer."

He stopped his horse and signed to Monsieur Marc to do the same. Almost immediately a second cry was heard coming from a much greater distance. It seemed the echo of the first, so exactly alike were the two sounds.

"We can safely go on; the road is clear," said the Vendéan leader.

"Then we are preceded by a scout?"

"Preceded and followed. We have a man two hundred steps before us and two hundred steps behind us."

"But who are they who answer the scouts?"

"Peasants, whose cottages are along the road. Look attentively at these cottages as you pass them, and you will see a small skylight open and the head of a man come up and remain there motionless, as if made of stone, until we are out of sight. If we were soldiers of some neighboring cantonment the man who looked at us would instantly leave his house by the back-door, and if there were any meeting or assemblage of any kind in the neighborhood warning would be given in time of the approach of the troops." Here the leader interrupted himself. "Listen!" he said.

The two riders stopped.

"This time," said the traveller, "I only heard one cry, I think,--that of our scout."

"You are right; no cry has answered his."

"Which means?"

"That troops are somewhere about."

So saying, he put his horse to a trot; the traveller did the same. Almost at the same moment they heard a hurried step behind them; it was that of their rear scout, who

now reached them, running as fast as his legs could carry him. At a fork of the road they found the man who preceded them standing still and undecided. His cry had not been answered from either road, and he was not sure which way was best to take. Both led to the same destination, but the one to left was the longest. After a moment's deliberation between the chief and the guide the latter took the path to the right. The Vendéan and the traveller followed him in about five minutes and were in turn followed by their rear-guard after the same lapse of time. These distances were carefully kept up between the advanced guard, the army corps, and the rear-guard.

Three hundred steps farther on the two royalists found their forward scout once more stationary. He made them a sign with his hand, requesting silence. Then, in a low voice, he said:--

"A patrol!"

Listening attentively they could hear, though at some distance, the regular tramp of marching men; it was, in fact, that of a small detachment of General Dermoncourt's column making a night inspection.

The traveller and the Vendéan leader were now in one of those sunken roads between banks and hedges so frequent in La Vendée at this period, and more especially during that of the great war, but which are now disappearing and giving place to well-constructed parish roads. The banks on either side were so steep that it would have been impossible to make the horses mount either of them, and there was no way of avoiding the patrol if they met it except by turning short round and gaining some open place where they might scatter to right or left. But in case of flight the patrol of foot-soldiers would, of course, hear the horsemen as plainly as the horsemen heard the foot-soldiers.

Suddenly the forward scout drew the attention of the Vendéan leader by a sign. He had seen, thanks to a momentary gleam of moonlight which instantly disappeared, the flash of bayonets; and his finger, pointing diagonally, showed the Vendéan

leader and the traveller the course they ought to follow. The soldiers (to avoid the water which usually flowed through these sunken roads or lanes after rainy weather), instead of marching along the lane, had climbed the bank and were now behind the natural hedge which grew at the top of it. This was on the left of the horsemen. By continuing in this way they would pass within ten feet of the riders and the scouts, who were hidden below them in the sunken lane. If either of the two horses had neighed the little troop would have been taken prisoners; but, as if the animals understood the danger, they were as still as their masters, and the soldiers passed on, without suspecting that any one was near. When the sound of their footfalls died away the travellers breathed again, and once more resumed their march.

A quarter of an hour later they turned from the road and entered the forest of Machecoul. There they were more at their ease; it was not likely that the soldiers would enter the woods at night, or at any rate take any but the main-roads which, like great arteries, passed through it. By taking one of the wood-paths known to the country-people, they had little to fear.

The two gentlemen now dismounted, and left their horses in charge of one of the scouts, while the other disappeared rapidly in the darkness, rendered deeper still by the leafing out of the May foliage. The Vendéan leader and the traveller followed the same path. It was evident that they were nearing the end of their journey. The abandonment of the horses amply proved it.

In fact, Maître Marc and the Vendéan had hardly gone two hundred yards from the place where they left the horses before they heard the hoot of an owl. The Vendéan leader put his hands to his mouth, and in reply to the long, lugubrious howl, he gave the sharp and piercing cry of the screech-owl. The hoot of the horned owl answered back.

"There's our man," said the Vendéan leader.

A few moments later the sound of steps was heard on the path before them, and their advanced scout came in sight, accompanied by a stranger. This stranger was no other than our friend Jean Oullier, sole and consequently first huntsman to the Marquis de Souday, who had temporarily renounced hunting, occupied as he was by the political events now developing around him.

In his previous introductions the traveller had noticed the use of one formula: "Here is a gentleman who wishes to speak to monsieur." This formula was now changed; and the Vendéan leader said to Jean Oullier, "Here is a gentleman who wishes to speak to Petit-Pierre."

To this Jean Oullier merely replied:--

"Let him follow me."

The traveller stretched out his hand to the Vendéan leader, who shook it cordially. Then he felt in his pocket, intending to divide the contents of his purse between the guides; but the Vendéan gentleman guessed his intention, and laying a hand on his arm, made him a sign not to do a thing which would seem to the worthy peasants an insult.

Maître Marc understood the matter, and a friendly grasp of their hands paid his debt to the peasants, as it had to their leader. After which, Jean Oullier took the path by which he had come, saying two words, with the brevity of an order and the tone of an invitation:--

"Follow me."

The traveller was beginning to get accustomed to these curt, mysterious ways, hitherto unknown to him, which revealed if not actual conspiracy, at least approaching insurrection. Shaded as the Vendéan leader and the guides were by their broad hats, he had scarcely seen their faces; and now in the darkness it was with difficulty that he made out even the form of Jean Oullier, although the latter slackened his pace, little by little, until he fell back almost to the traveller's side.

Maître Marc felt that his guide had something to say to him, and he listened attentively. Presently he heard these words, uttered like a murmur:--

"We are watched; a man is following us through the wood. Do not be disturbed if you see me disappear. Wait for me at the place where you lose sight of me."

The traveller answered by a simple motion of the head, which meant, "Very good; as you say."

They walked on fifty steps farther. Suddenly Jean Oullier darted into the wood. Thirty or forty feet in the depths of it a sound was heard like that of a deer rising in affright. The noise went off in the distance, as though it were indeed a deer that had made it. Jean Oullier's steps were heard in the same direction. Then all sounds died away.

The traveller leaned against an oak and waited. At the end of twenty minutes a voice said beside him:--

"Now, we'll go on."

He quivered. The voice was really that of Jean Oullier, but the old huntsman had come back so gently that not a single sound betrayed his return.

"Well?" said the traveller.

"Lost time!" exclaimed Jean Oullier.

"No one there?"

"Some one; but the villain knows the wood as well as I do."

"So that you didn't overtake him?"

Oullier shook his head as though it cost him too much to put into words that a man had escaped him.

"And you don't know who he was?"

"I suspect one man," said Jean Oullier, stretching his arm toward the south; "but in any case he is an evil one." Then, as they reached the edge of the woods, he added,

"Here we are."

The traveller now saw the farmhouse of Banl[oe]uvre looming up before him. Jean Oullier looked attentively to both sides of the road. The road was clear; he crossed it alone. Then with a pass-key he opened the gate.

"Come!" he said.

Maître Marc crossed the highway rapidly and disappeared through the gate, which closed behind him. A white figure came out on the portico.

"Who's there?" asked a woman's voice, but a strong, imperative voice.

"I, Mademoiselle Bertha," responded Jean Oullier.

"You are not alone, my friend?"

"I have brought the gentleman from Paris who wishes to speak to Petit-Pierre."

Bertha came down the steps and met the traveller.

"Come in, monsieur," she said.

And she led the way into a salon rather poorly furnished, though the floor was admirably waxed and the curtains irreproachably clean. A great fire was burning, and near the fire was a table on which a supper was already served.

"Sit down, monsieur," said the young girl with perfect grace, which, however, was not without a certain masculine tone which gave it much originality. "You must be hungry and thirsty; pray eat and drink. Petit-Pierre is asleep; but he gave orders to be waked if any one arrived from Paris. You have just come from Paris, have you not?"

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"In ten minutes I will return."

And Bertha disappeared like a vision. The traveller remained a few seconds motionless with amazement. He was an observer, and never had he seen more grace and more charm mingled with strength of will than in Bertha's demeanor. She might be, thought he, the young Achilles, disguised as a woman, before he saw the blade

of Ulysses. Absorbed in this thought or in others allied to it, the traveller forgot to eat or drink.

Bertha returned as she had promised.

"Petit-Pierre is ready to receive you, monsieur," she said.

The traveller rose; Bertha walked before him. She held in her hand a short taper, which she raised to light the staircase, and which lighted her own face at the same time. The traveller looked admiringly at her beautiful black hair and her fine black eyes, her ivory skin, with all its signs of youth and health, and the firm and easy poise of the figure, which seemed to typify a goddess.

He murmured with a smile, remembering his Virgil,--that man who himself is a smile of antiquity,--"Incessu patuit dea!"

The young girl rapped at the door of a bedroom.

"Come in," replied a woman's voice.

The door opened. The young girl bowed slightly and allowed the traveller to pass her. It was easy to see that humility was not her leading virtue.

The traveller then passed in. The door closed behind him, and Bertha remained outside.

IV.

A LITTLE HISTORY DOES NO HARM.

The room into which Maître Marc was now shown had been recently built; the plastered walls were damp, and the wainscot showed the fibre of its wood under the slight coating of paint that covered it. In this room, lying on a bedstead of common pine roughly put together, he saw a woman, and in that woman he recognized her Royal Highness the Duchesse de Berry.

Maître Marc's attention fixed itself wholly upon her. The sheets of the miserable bed

were of the finest lawn, and this luxury of white and exquisite linen was the only thing about her which testified in any degree to her station in the world. A shawl with red and green checkers formed her counterpane. A paltry fireplace of plaster, with a small wooden mantel, warmed the apartment, the only furniture of which was a table covered with papers, on which were a pair of pistols, and two chairs, where lay the garments of a peasant-lad and a brown wig. The chair with the wig stood near the table, that with the clothes was near the bed.

The princess wore on her head one of those woollen coifs distinctive of the Vendéan peasant-women, the ends of which fell on her shoulders. By the light of two wax candles, placed on the shabby rosewood night-table (a relic, evidently, of some castle furniture), the duchess was looking through her correspondence. A large number of letters, placed on this table and held in place by a second pair of pistols, which served as a paper-weight, were still unopened.

Madame appeared to be awaiting the new-comer impatiently, for as soon as she saw him she leaned half out of her bed and stretched her two hands toward him. He took them, kissed them respectfully, and the duchess felt a tear from the eyes of her faithful partisan on the hand he kept longest in his own.

"Tears!" she said. "You do not bring me bad news, monsieur, surely?"

"They come from my heart, Madame," replied Maître Marc. "They express my devotion and the deep regret I feel in seeing you so isolated, so lost in this lonely Vendéan farmhouse,--you, whom I have seen--"

He stopped, for the tears choked his voice. The duchess took up his unfinished phrase.

"At the Tuileries, you mean, on the steps of a throne. Well, my good friend, I was far worse guarded and less well served there than I am here. Here I am guarded and served by a fidelity which shows itself in devotion, there I was served by the self-interest that calculates. But come, to business; it makes me uneasy to observe

that you are delaying. Give me the news from Paris at once! Is it good news?"

"Pray believe, Madame," said Maître Marc, "I entreat you to believe in my deep regret at being forced to advise prudence,--I, a man of enthusiasm!"

"Ah! ah!" exclaimed the duchess. "While my friends in La Vendée are being killed for my sake, the friends in Paris are prudent, are they? You see I have good reason for telling you I am better served and guarded here than I ever was at the Tuileries."

"Better guarded, yes, Madame; better served, no! There are moments when prudence is the very genius of success."

"But, monsieur," said the duchess, impatiently, "I am as well informed on the state of Paris as you can be, and I know that a revolution is imminent."

"Madame," replied the lawyer, in a firm, sonorous voice, "we have lived for a year and a half in the midst of riots and tumults, and none of them have yet been able to rise to the level of revolution."

"Louis-Philippe is unpopular."

"Granted; but that does not mean that Henri V. is popular."

"Henri V! Henri V! My son is not Henri V., monsieur; he is Henri IV. the Second."

"As for that, Madame, may I be allowed to say that he is still too young to enable us to be sure of his true name and nature. The more we are devoted to our leader the more we owe him the truth."

"The truth! yes, yes. I ask for it; I want it. But what is the truth?"

"Madame it is this. Unfortunately, the memories of a people are lost when their horizon is narrow. The French people--I mean that material, brute force which makes convulsions and sometimes (when inspired from above) revolutions--has two great recollections that take the place of all others. One goes back forty-three years, the other seventeen years. The first is the taking of the Bastille; in other words the victory of the people over royalty,--a victory that bestowed the tricolor banner upon

the nation. The second memory is the double restoration of 1814 and 1815; the victory of royalty over the masses,--a victory which imposed the white banner on the nation. Madame, in great national movements all is symbolic. The tricolor flag is liberty to the people; it bears inscribed upon its pennant the thought, 'By token of this flag we conquer.' The white flag is the banner of despotism; it bears upon its double face the sign, 'By token of this flag we are conquered.'"

"Monsieur!"

"You asked for the truth, Madame; let me, therefore, tell it to you."

"Yes, but after you have told it you will allow me to reply."

Louis Philippe

"Ah, Madame, I should be glad indeed if your reply could convince me."

"Go on."

"You left Paris on the 28th of July, Madame; you did not witness the fury with which the populace tore down the white flag and trampled on the fleurs-de-lis."

"The flag of Denain and of Taillebourg! the fleurs-de-lis of Saint-Louis and of Louis XIV.!"

"Unhappily, Madame, the populace remember only Waterloo; they know only Louis XVI.,--a defeat and an execution. Well, the great difficulty I foresee for your son, the descendant of Saint-Louis and of Louis XIV., is that very flag of Taillebourg and of Denain. If his Majesty Henri V., or Henry IV. the Second, as you so intelligently call him, returns to Paris bearing the white banner, he will not pass the faubourg Saint-Antoine; before he reaches the Bastille he is dead."

"And if he enters with the tricolor,--what then?"

"Worse still, Madame; he is dishonored."

The duchess bounded in her bed. But at first she was silent; then, after a pause, she said:--

"Perhaps it is the truth; but it is hard."

"I promised you the whole truth, and I keep my word."

"But, if that is your conviction, monsieur, why do you remain attached to a party which has no possible chance of success?"

"Because I have sworn allegiance with heart and lips to that white banner without which, and with which, your son can never return, and I would rather die than be dishonored."

The duchess was once more silent.

"But," she said presently, "all this that you tell me does not tally with the information which induced me to come to France."

"No, doubtless it does not, Madame; but you must remember one thing,--if truth does sometimes reach a reigning prince it is never told to a dethroned one."

"Permit me to say that in your capacity as a lawyer, monsieur, you may be suspected of cultivating paradox."

"Paradox, Madame, is one of the many facets of eloquence; only here, in presence of your Royal Highness, my purpose is not to be eloquent, but to be true."

"Pardon me, but you said just now that truth was never told to dethroned princes; either you were mistaken then or you are misleading me now."

The lawyer bit his lips; he was hoist with his own petard.

"Did I say never, Madame?"

"You said never."

"Then let us suppose there is an exception, and that I am permitted by God to be that exception."

"Agreed. And I now ask, why is truth not told to dethroned princes?"

"Because while princes on their thrones may have, at times, men of satisfied

ambition about them, dethroned princes have only inordinate ambitions to satisfy. No doubt, Madame, you have certain generous hearts about you who devote themselves to your cause with complete self-abnegation; but there are, none the less, many others who regard your return to France solely as a path opened to their private ends, to their personal reputation, fortune, honor. There are, besides, dissatisfied men who have lost their position and are craving to re-conquer it and avenge themselves on those who turned them out of it. Well, all such persons take a false view of facts; they cannot perceive the truth of the situation. Their desires become hopes, their hopes beliefs; they dream incessantly of a revolution which may come possibly, but most assuredly not when they expect it. They deceive themselves and they deceive you; they began by lying to themselves, and now they are lying to you. They are dragging you into the danger they are rushing into themselves. Hence the error, the fatal error, into which you are now being hurried, Madame,--an error I implore you to recognize in presence of the truth which I have, so cruelly perhaps, unveiled before your eyes."

"In short," said the duchess, all the more impatiently because these words confirmed those she had heard during the conference at the château de Souday, "what is it that you have brought in your toga, Maître Cicero? Is it peace or war? Out with it!"

"As it is proper that we maintain the traditions of constitutional royalty, I answer your Highness that it is for her, in her capacity as regent, to decide."

"Yes, indeed; and have my Chambers refuse me subsidies if I do not decide as they wish. Oh, Maître Marc, I know the fictions of your constitutional régime, the principal feature of which is to do the work, not of those who speak wisely, but of those who talk the most. But you must have heard the opinions of my faithful and trusty adherents as to the present opportunity for a great uprising. What is that opinion? What is your own opinion? We have talked of truth; truth is sometimes an awful spectre. No matter; woman as I am, I dare to evoke it."

"It is because I am convinced there is the stuff of twenty kings in Madame's head and heart that I have not hesitated to take upon myself a mission which I feel to be distressing."

"Ah, here we come to the point! Less diplomacy, if you please, Maître Marc; speak out firmly, as you should to one who is, what I am here, a soldier."

Then, observing that the traveller, taking off his cravat, was tearing it apart in search of a paper.

"Give it me! give it me!" she cried; "I can do that quicker than you."

The letter was written in cipher.

"I should lose time in making it out," said the duchess; "read it to me. It must be easy to you, who probably know what is in it."

Maître Marc took the paper from her hand and read, without hesitating, the following letter:--

"Those persons in whom an honorable confidence has been reposed cannot refrain from testifying their regret at unwise councils which have brought about the present crisis. Those councils were given, no doubt, by zealous men; but those men little understand the actual state of things, or the condition of the public mind.

"They deceive themselves if they think there is any possibility of an uprising in Paris. It would be impossible to find twelve hundred men, not connected with the police, who would consent to make a riot in the streets and Guard and the faithful garrison.

"They deceive themselves likewise about La Vendée, just as they deceived themselves about Marseille and the South. La Vendée, that land of devotion and sacrifice, is controlled by a numerous army supported by the population of the cities, which are almost wholly anti-legitimist; a rising of the peasantry could only end in devastating the country and in consolidating the present government by an easy

victory.

"It is thought that if the mother of Henri V. be really in France she should hasten her departure as much as possible, after exhorting all the Vendéan leaders to keep absolutely quiet. If, instead of organizing civil war, she appeals for peace, she would have the double glory of doing a grand and courageous deed and of preventing the effusion of French blood.

"The true friends of Legitimacy, who have not been informed of present intentions, and not consulted on the perilous risks which are being taken, and who have known nothing of acts until they were accomplished, desire to place the responsibility of those acts on the persons who have advised and promoted them. They disclaim either honor or blame for whatever result of fortune may be the upshot."

During the reading of this communication Madame was a prey to the keenest agitation. Her face, habitually pale, was flushed; her trembling hand pushed back the woollen cap she wore, and was thrust through and through her hair. She did not utter a word or interrupt the reader in any way, but it was evident that her calm preceded a tempest. In order to divert it, Maître Marc said, as he folded the letter and gave it to her:--

"I did not write that letter, Madame."

"No," replied the duchess, unable to restrain herself any longer; "but he who brought it was capable of writing it."

Maître Marc felt sure that he should gain nothing in dealing with that eager, impressionable nature if he lowered his head. He therefore drew himself up to his full height.

"Yes," he said; "and he blushes for a moment's weakness. And he now declares to your Royal Highness that while he does not approve of certain expressions in the letter he shares the sentiment that dictated it."

"Sentiment!" cried the duchess. "Call it selfishness; call it caution, that comes very

near to--"

"Cowardice, you mean, Madame. Yes, that heart is cowardly, indeed, that leaves all and comes to share a situation it never counselled. Yes, the man is selfish who stands here and says, 'You asked for the truth, Madame, and here it is; but if it pleases your Royal Highness to advance to a death as useless as it is certain I shall march beside you.'"

The duchess was silent for a few moments; then she resumed, more gently:--

"I appreciate your devotion, monsieur, but you do not understand the temper of La Vendée; you derive your information from those who oppose the movement."

"So be it. Let us suppose that which is not; let us suppose that La Vendée will surround you with battalions and spare neither blood nor sacrifices for the cause; nevertheless La Vendée is not France."

"Having told me that the people of Paris hate the fleur-de-lis and despise the white flag, do you now want me to believe that all France shares those feelings of the Parisian populace?"

"Alas! Madame, France is logical; it is we who are pursuing chimeras in dreaming of an alliance between the divine right of kings and popular sovereignty,--two things which howl and rend each other when coupled. The divine right leads fatally and inevitably to absolutism, and France will no longer submit to absolutism."

"Absolutism! absolutism! a fine word to frighten children!"

"No, it is not a fine word; it is a terrible one. Perhaps we are nearer to the thing itself than we think; but I grieve to say to you, Madame, that I do not believe that God reserves to your royal son the dangerous honor of muzzling the popular lion."

"Why not, monsieur?"

"Because it is he whom that lion most distrusts. The moment it sees him approaching in the distance, the lion shakes his mane, sharpens his teeth and claws,

and will suffer him to come nearer only for the purpose of springing upon him. No one could be the grandson of Louis XVI. with impunity, Madame."

"Then, according to you, the Bourbon dynasty has seen its last days."

"God grant that such an idea may never come to me, Madame. What I mean is that revolutions never go backward; I believe that if they once come to birth it is best not to stop their development. It is attempting the impossible; it is like trying to drive a mountain torrent backward to its source. Either our present revolution will be fruitful of national good,--in which case, Madame, I know the patriotism of your feelings too well not to be sure you would accept it,--or it will be a barren failure, and then the faults of those who have seized the sovereign power will serve your son far better than all our efforts could."

"But, in that case, monsieur, things may go on thus to the end of time."

"Madame, his Majesty Henri V. is a principle, and principles share with God the privilege of having their kingdom in eternity."

"Therefore, it is your opinion that I ought to renounce my present hopes, abandon my compromised friends, and three days hence, when they take up arms, leave them in the lurch and justify the man who tells them, 'Marie-Caroline, for whom you are ready to fight, for whom you are ready to die, despairs of her prospects and recoils at fate; Marie-Caroline is afraid.' Oh, no; never, never, never, monsieur!"

"Your friends will not be able to make you that reproach, Madame, for they will not take arms, as you suppose, a few days hence."

"Are you ignorant that the day is fixed for the 24th?"

"The order is countermanded."

"Countermanded!" cried the duchess; "when?"

"To-day."

"To-day!" she exclaimed, lifting herself up by her wrists. "By whom?"

"By the man you yourself commanded them to obey."

"The maréchal?"

"The maréchal, following the instructions of the committee in Paris."

"But," cried the duchess, "am I to be of no account?"

"You, Madame!" exclaimed the messenger, falling on one knee and clasping his hands,--"you are all. That is why we seek your safety; it is why we will not let you be sacrificed in a useless effort; that is why we fear to let you risk your popularity by a defeat."

"Monsieur, monsieur," said the duchess, "if Maria Theresa's counsellors had been as timid as mine she would never have re-conquered the throne of her son."

"It is, on the contrary, to secure, at a later period, your son's throne that we now say to you, Madame, 'Leave France; let the people know you as an angel of peace, not as a demon of war.'"

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed the duchess, pressing her clenched fists to her eyes; "what humiliation! what cowardice!"

Maître Marc continued as though he did not hear her, or rather as if his resolution to make known a truth to her mind was so fixed that nothing could change it.

"All precautions are taken to enable Madame to leave France without molestation. A vessel is cruising in the bay of Bourgneuf; your Highness can be on board of her in three hours."

"Oh, noble land of Vendée!" cried the duchess; "could I have believed you would repulse me, drive me from you,--me who came to you in the name of your God and your king? Ah! I thought that Paris alone was unfaithful, ungrateful; but you,--you to whom I come seeking the recovery of a throne, you deny me so much as a place of burial! Oh, no, no; I never could have believed it!"

"But you will go, will you not, Madame?" said the messenger, still on his knees,

with clasped hands.

"Yes, I will go," said the duchess. "I will leave France. But remember this, I shall never return, for I will never come with foreigners. They are only waiting, as you well know, for the right moment to form a coalition against Philippe. When that moment comes they will ask me for my son,--not that they care for him more than they cared for Louis XVI. in 1792, or Louis XVIII. in 1813, but he can be made the means of their having a party in Paris. Well, I say to you, no! they shall not have my son; no! they shall not have him, not for a kingdom! Rather than that I will fly with him to the mountains of Calabria. I tell you, monsieur, if he must buy the throne by the cession of a province, a town, a fortress, a house, a cottage like that I am now in, I swear as regent and as his mother, that he shall never be king of France. And now, that is all I have to say to you. Go back to those who sent you and repeat my words."

Maître Marc rose and bowed to the duchess, expecting that as he left she would offer one of the two hands she had stretched out to him when he came; but she was motionless, stern, her fists were closed, her brows knitted.

"God guard your Highness!" said the messenger, believing it was useless to stay longer, and thinking, not without reason, that as long as he was there not a muscle of that generous organization would give way.

He was not mistaken; but the door was scarcely closed behind him before Madame, exhausted by the strain, fell back upon her bed and sobbed aloud:--

"Oh, Bonneville! my poor Bonneville!"

V.

PETIT-PIERRE RESOLVES ON KEEPING A BRAVE HEART AGAINST MISFORTUNE.

Immediately after the conversation we have just reported, the traveller left the farmhouse; he was anxious to be back at Nantes before the middle of the day. A few

moments after his departure, though it was scarcely daylight, Petit-Pierre, dressed in her peasant's clothes, left her room and went to the hall on the ground-floor of the farmhouse.

This was a vast room, the dingy walls of which were denuded in many places of the plaster that originally covered them, while the beams across the ceiling were blackened by smoke. It was furnished with a large wardrobe of polished oak, the brass locks and handles of which sparkled in the shadow of the dull, brown masses about it. The rest of the furniture consisted of two beds, standing parallel, surrounded by curtains of green serge, two common pitchers, and a clock in a tall carved wooden case, the ticking of which was the only sign of life in the silence of the night.

The fireplace was broad and high, and its shelf was draped with a band of serge like that of the curtains; only, instead of fading to a rusty green, this piece of stuff, owing to the smoke, had changed to a dingy brown. On this mantel-shelf were the usual adornments,--a wax figure, representing the Child Jesus, covered by a glass shade; two china pots, containing artificial flowers, covered by gauze to protect them from flies; a double-barrelled gun; and a branch of consecrated holly.

This hall was separated from the stable by a thin board partition, and through this partition, in which were sliding panels, the cows poked their heads to eat the provender that was laid for them on the floor of the room.

When Petit-Pierre opened the door a man who was warming himself under the high mantel of the fireplace rose and walked away respectfully to leave his seat free to the new-comer. But Petit-Pierre made him a sign with one hand to resume his chair, gently pushing him with the other. Petit-Pierre then fetched a stool and sat down in the farther corner of the fireplace opposite to the man, who was no other than Jean Oullier. Then she leaned her head on her hand, put her elbow on her knee, and sat absorbed in reflection, while her foot, beaten with a feverish motion which

communicated a tremulous movement to the whole body, showed that she was under the shock of some deep vexation.

Jean Oullier, who, on his side, had subjects for thought and anxiety, remained silent and gloomy, twisting his pipe, which he had taken from his mouth when Petit-Pierre entered the room, mechanically in his fingers, and issuing from his meditations only to give vent to sighs that seemed like threats, or to push the burning logs together on the hearth.

Petit-Pierre spoke first.

"Were not you smoking when I came in, my brave fellow?" she said.

"Yes," he replied, with a very unusual tone of respect in his voice.

"Why don't you continue?"

"I am afraid it may annoy you."

"Nonsense! We are bivouacking, or something very like it, my friend; and I am all the more anxious it should be comfortable for all, for it is our last night together."

Enigmatical as these words were to him, Jean Oullier did not allow himself to ask their meaning. With the wonderful tact which characterizes the Vendéan peasantry, he refrained from profiting by the permission given, but without showing by look or sign that he knew the real rank and quality of Petit-Pierre.

In spite of Petit-Pierre's own pre-occupations, she noticed the clouds which darkened the peasant's face. She again broke silence.

"What is the matter, my dear Jean Oullier?" she asked. "Why do you look so gloomy when I should expect, on the contrary, to see you joyful?"

"Why should I be joyful?" asked the old keeper.

"Because a good and faithful servant like you shares in the happiness of his masters; and I think your young mistress looks happy enough to have a little of her joy reflected in your face."

"God grant her joy may last!" replied Jean Oullier, with a doubtful smile.

"Why, Jean, surely you do not object to marriages of inclination! For my part, I love them; they are the only ones I have ever, in all my life, been willing to help on."

"I have no objection to such marriages," replied Jean Oullier; "but I have a great objection to this husband."

"Why?"

Jean Oullier did not reply.

"Speak," said Petit-Pierre.

The Vendéan shook his head.

"Tell me, I beg of you, my dear Jean. I know your young ladies, and I know now that they are like your own children to you; you need not have any secrets from me. Though I am not the Holy Father himself, you know very well that I have power to bind and unbind."

"I know that you can do much," said Jean Oullier.

"Then tell me why you disapprove of this marriage?"

"Because disgrace attaches to the name every woman must bear if she marries Monsieur Michel de la Logerie; and this woman ought not to give up one of the noblest names in the land to take it."

"Ah, my dear Jean," said Petit-Pierre, with a sad smile, "you are doubtless ignorant that in these days children do not inherit as a tradition either the virtues or the faults of their ancestors."

"Yes, I was ignorant of that," said Jean Oullier.

"It is task enough," continued Petit-Pierre, "or so it appears, for each man to answer for himself in our day. See how many fail!--how many are missing from our ranks, where the name they bear ought to have kept them! Let us, therefore, be grateful to those who, in spite of their father's example, in spite of their family ties, or the

temptations to their personal ambition, come to our banner with the old chivalric sentiment of devotion and fidelity in misfortune."

Jean Oullier raised his head and said, with a look of hatred he did not attempt to conceal:--

"You may be ignorant--"

Petit-Pierre interrupted him.

"I am not ignorant," she said. "I know the crime you lay to the Logerie father; but I know also what I owe to the son, wounded for me and still bleeding from that wound. As to his father's crime,--if his father really committed it, which God alone can decide,--he expiated that crime by a violent death."

"Yes," replied Jean Oullier, lowering his head; "that is true."

"Who dares to penetrate the judgments of Providence? Can you venture to say that when he, in his turn, appeared before that Judgment-seat, pale and bloody from a violent death, the Divine mercy was not laid upon his head? Why, then, if God himself may have been satisfied, should you be more stern, more implacable than God?"

Jean Oullier listened without replying. Every word of Petit-Pierre made the religious chords of his heart vibrate, and shook his resolutions of hatred toward Baron Michel, but did not uproot them altogether.

"Monsieur Michel," continued Petit-Pierre, "is a good and brave young man, gentle and modest, simple and devoted; he is rich, which certainly does no harm. I think that your young mistress, with her rather self-willed character and her habits of independence, could not do better. I am convinced she will be perfectly happy with a man of his nature. Why ask more of God, my poor Jean Oullier? Forget the past," added Petit-Pierre, with a sigh. "Alas! if we remembered all, we could love nothing."

Jean Oullier shook his head.

"Monsieur Petit-Pierre," he said, "you speak well and like a good Christian; but there are things that cannot be driven from the memory, and, unfortunately for Monsieur Michel, my connection with his father is one of them."

"I do not ask your secrets, Jean," replied Petit-Pierre, gravely; "but the young baron, as you know, has shed his blood for me. He has been my guide; he has given me a refuge in this house, which is his. I feel something more than regard for him,--I feel gratitude; and it would be a real grief to me to think that dissensions existed among my friends. So, my dear Jean Oullier, in the name of the devotion you have shown to my person, I ask you, if not to abjure your memories,--for, as you say, we cannot always do that,--at any rate, to stifle your hatred until time, until the sight of the happiness the son of your enemy bestows upon the child you have brought up and loved, has effaced that hatred from your soul."

"Let that happiness come in the way God wills, and I will thank Him for it; but I do not believe it will enter the château de Souday with Monsieur Michel."

"Why not, if you please, my good Jean?"

"Because the closer I look, Monsieur Petit-Pierre, the more I doubt whether Monsieur Michel loves Mademoiselle Bertha."

Petit-Pierre shrugged her shoulders impatiently.

"Permit me, my dear Jean Oullier," she said, "to doubt your perspicacity in love."

"You may be right," said the old Vendéan; "but if this marriage with Mademoiselle Bertha--the greatest honor to which that young man can aspire--really fulfils his wishes, why did he make such haste to leave the farmhouse; and why has he been roaming all night in the woods, like a madman?"

"If he has been wandering all night, as you say," said Petit-Pierre, smiling, "it is because happiness will not let him rest; if he has really left the farm, it is probably on some business for the cause."

"I hope so. I am not of those who think only of themselves; and though I am quite determined to leave the family when the son of Michel enters it, I will none the less pray God, night and morning, to promote the child's happiness. At the same time, I shall watch that man. If he loves her, as you say he does, I will try to prevent my presentiments from being realized,--presentiments, I mean, that instead of happiness he will only bring despair upon his wife."

"Thank you, Jean Oullier. Then, I may hope--you promise me, don't you?--that you will not show your teeth to my young friend?"

"I shall keep my hatred and my distrust in the depths of my heart, and only bring them forth in case he justifies them; that is all I can promise you. Do not ask me to like him, or respect him."

"Unconquerable race!" muttered Petit-Pierre, in a low voice; "it is that which has made thee so strong, so grand."

"Yes," replied Jean Oullier to this aside, said loud enough for the old Vendéan to overhear it,--"yes; we of this region, we have but one love and one hatred. Can you complain of that?"

And he looked fixedly at Petit-Pierre, with a sort of respectful challenge.

"No," said the latter; "and I complain of it the less because it is nearly all that remains to Henri V. of his heritage of fourteen centuries,--and it is powerless, they say."

"Who says so?" cried the Vendéan, rising, in a tone that was almost threatening.

"You will soon know. We have talked of your interests, Jean Oullier, and I am not sorry, for our talk has been a truce to thoughts that were sad indeed. Now I must return to my own affairs. What time is it?"

"Half-past four."

"Then wake up our friends. Their political anxieties allow them to sleep; not so with

me, for my politics are of one sole thing,--maternal love. Go, friend!"

Jean Oullier went out. Petit-Pierre, with bowed head, walked up and down the room; sometimes she stamped with impatience, and wrung her hands in despair. Presently she returned to the hearth. Two big tears were rolling down her cheeks, and her emotion seemed to choke her. Then she fell on her knees, and clasping her hands, prayed to God, the Giver of all good, the Dispenser of crowns, to enlighten and guide her resolutions and to grant her either an indomitable power to fulfil her task or the resignation to endure defeat.

VI.

HOW JEAN OULLIER PROVED THAT WHEN THE WINE IS DRAWN IT IS BEST TO DRINK IT.

Some minutes later Gaspard, Louis Renaud, and the Marquis de Souday entered the room. Seeing Petit-Pierre on her knees, absorbed in prayer and meditation, they paused on the threshold; and the Marquis de Souday, who had thought proper to salute the reveille, as in the good old times, with a song, stopped short in his tune respectfully.

But Petit-Pierre had heard the opening of the door. She rose and addressed those who stood there.

"Come in, gentlemen, and forgive me for disturbing you so early," she said; "but I have important determinations to announce to you."

"On the contrary, it is we who ought to ask your Royal Highness's pardon for not foreseeing her wishes and for having slept while we might have been useful to her," said Louis Renaud.

"A truce to compliments, my friend," interrupted Petit-Pierre. "That appanage of royalty is ill-timed now that royalty is deserted and engulfed for the second time."

"What can you mean?"

"I mean, my good and dear friends," resumed Petit-Pierre turning her back to the fireplace, while the Vendéans stood in a circle round her,--"I mean that I have called you to me that I may now give back your promises and bid you farewell."

"Give back our promises! bid us farewell!" cried her astonished partisans. "Your Royal Highness is surely not thinking of leaving us?"

Then, all together, looking at each other, they cried out:--

"It is impossible!"

"Nevertheless, I must."

"Why so?"

"Because I am advised,--more than that, I am adjured to do so."

"By whom?"

"By those whose judgment and intelligence I cannot doubt, any more than I distrust their devotion and fidelity."

"But for what reasons?--under what pretexts?"

"It seems that the royalist cause is despaired of even in La Vendée; the white banner is a rag which France repudiates. I am told there are not in Paris twelve hundred men who, for a few francs, would begin a riot in the streets; that it is false to say that we have sympathizers in the army, false that certain of the government are true to us, false that the Bocage is ready to rise as one man to defend the rights of Henri V.--"

"But," interrupted the noble Vendéan who had for the time changed a name illustrious in the great war for that of Gaspard, and who seemed incapable of longer controlling himself, "who gives such advice? Who speaks of La Vendée with such assurance? Who measures our devotion, and says, 'Thus far and no farther shall it go'?"

"Various royalist committees that I need not name to you, but whose opinion we must regard."

"Royalist committees!" cried the Marquis de Souday. "Ha! parbleu! I know them; and if Madame will believe me, we had better treat their advice as the late Marquis de Charette treated the advice of the royalist committees of his day."

"How was that, my brave Souday?" said Petit-Pierre.

"The respect I have for your Royal Highness," replied the marquis, with magnificent self-possession, "will not, unfortunately, allow of my specifying further."

Petit-Pierre could not help smiling.

"Ah!" she said; "we no longer live in the good old times, my poor marquis. Monsieur de Charette was an autocratic sovereign in his own camp, and the Regent Marie-Caroline will never be anything but a very constitutional regent. The proposed uprising can succeed only on condition of complete agreement among all those who desire its success. Now, I ask you, does that complete agreement exist when, on the eve of the uprising, notice is given to the general that three fourths of those on whom he counted would not take part in it?"

"What matter for that?" cried the Marquis de Souday; "the fewer we are at the rendezvous, the greater the glory to those who appear."

"Madame," said Gaspard, gravely, "they went to you, and they said to you,--when perhaps you had no thought of re-entering France,--'The men who deposed King Charles X. are held at arm's length by the present government and reduced to impotence; the ministry is so composed that you will find few if any changes necessary to make there; the clergy, a stationary and immovable power, will lend its whole influence to the re-establishment of the legitimate royalty by divine right; the courts are still administered by men who owe their all to the Restoration; the army, fundamentally obedient, is under the orders of a leader who has said that in public policy there should be more than one flag; the people, made sovereign in 1830, has fallen under the yoke of the most idiotic and most inept of aristocracies. Come, then,' they said, 'your entry into France will be another return from Elba. The

population will everywhere crowd around you to hail the last scion of our kings whom the nation desires to proclaim!' On the faith of these words you have come to us, Madame; and at your coming we have risen to arms. I hold it, therefore, an error for our cause and a shame for ourselves that this retreat, which would impeach your own political sagacity and prove our personal powerlessness, has been demanded of you."

"Yes," said Petit-Pierre, who by a singular turn of fate found herself called upon to defend a course which was breaking her heart,--"yes; all you say is true. I was promised all that; but it is neither your fault nor mine, my brave, true friends, if fools have taken baseless hopes for realities. Impartial history will say that when I was accused of being a faithless mother (and I have been so accused) I answered, as I was bound to answer, 'Here I am, ready to make all sacrifices!' History will also say of you, my loyal friends, that the more my cause seemed hopeless and abandoned the less you hesitated in your devotion to it. But it is a matter of honor with me not to put that devotion to the proof uselessly. Let us talk plainly, friends. Let us come down to figures; they are practical. How many men do you think we can muster at this moment?"

"Ten thousand at the first signal."

"Alas!" said Petit-Pierre; "that is many, but not enough. Louis-Philippe has at least four hundred and eighty thousand unemployed troops, not to speak of the National Guard."

"But think of the defections of the officers who will resign," said the marquis.

"Well," said Petit-Pierre, addressing Gaspard, "I place my destiny and that of my son in your hands. Tell me, assure me, on your honor as a gentleman, that we have two chances in ten of success, and instead of ordering you to lay down your arms, I will stay among you to share your perils and your fate."

At this direct appeal, not to his feelings but to his convictions, Gaspard bent his head

and made no answer.

"You see," resumed Petit-Pierre, "that your judgment and your heart are not in unison. It would be a crime in me to use a chivalry which common-sense condemns. Let us, therefore, not discuss that which has been decided,--wisely decided, perhaps. Let us rather pray God to send me back to you in better times and under more favorable auspices. Meantime, let us now think only of my departure."

No doubt the gentlemen present felt the necessity of this resolution; little as it agreed with their feelings. Believing that the duchess was fully determined on it, they answered nothing and only turned away to hide their tears. The Marquis de Souday walked about the room with an impatience he did not attempt to disguise.

"Yes," said Petit-Pierre, bitterly, after a long silence,--"yes, some have said, like Pilate, 'I wash my hands of it,' and my heart, so strong in danger, so strong to meet death, has yielded; for it cannot face in cold blood the responsibility of failure and the useless shedding of blood. Others--"

"Blood that flows for the faith is never uselessly shed," said a voice from the chimney-corner. "God himself has said it, and, humble as I am, I dare to repeat the words of God. Every man who believes and dies for his belief is a martyr; his blood enriches the earth and hastens the harvest."

"Who said that?" asked Petit-Pierre, eagerly, rising on the tips of her toes.

"I," said Jean Oullier, simply, getting up from the stool on which he was sitting, and entering the circle of nobles and leaders.

"You, my brave fellow!" cried Petit-Pierre, delighted to find a reinforcement at the very moment she seemed to be abandoned by all. "Then you don't agree with the Parisian gentlemen. Come here, and speak your mind. In these days Jacques Bonhomme is never out of place, even at a royal council."

"I am so little of the opinion that you ought to leave France," said Jean Oullier, "that if I had the honor to be a gentleman, like those present, I should lock the door and

bar your way and say, 'You shall not leave us!'"

"But your reasons? I am eager to hear them. Speak, speak, my Jean!"

"My reasons?--my reasons are that you are our flag; and so long as one of your soldiers is left standing, be he the humblest of your army, he should bear it aloft and steady until death makes it his winding-sheet."

"Go on, go on, Jean Oullier! You speak well."

"My reasons?--one is that you are the first of your race who have come to fight with those who fight for its cause, and it would be a shameful thing to let you go without a sword being drawn from its scabbard."

"Go on, go on, Jacques Bonhomme!" cried Petit-Pierre, striking her hands together.

"But," interrupted Louis Renaud, alarmed at the attention the duchess gave to Jean Oullier, "the withdrawals we have just heard of deprive the movement of all chance of success; it will be nothing more than a mere skirmish."

"No, no; that man is right!" cried Gaspard, who had yielded with great reluctance to Petit-Pierre's arguments. "An attempt, if only a skirmish, is better than the nonexistence into which we should drop. A skirmish is a date, a fact; it will stand in history, and the day will come when the people will forget all except the courage of those who led it. If it does not lead to the recovery of the throne it will at least leave traces on the memory of nations. Who would remember the name of Charles Edward were it not for the skirmishes of Preston-Pans and Culloden? Ah, Madame, I long to do as this brave peasant advises!"

"And you would be all the more right, Monsieur le comte," said Jean Oullier, with an assurance which showed that these questions, apparently above his level, were familiar to him,--"you would be all the more right because the principal object of her Royal Highness, that to which she is even willing to sacrifice the monarchy confided to her regency,--I mean the welfare of the people,--will otherwise fail."

"How do you mean?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"The moment Madame withdraws and the government knows she is safely out of the country, persecutions will begin; and they will be the more keen, the more violent, because we shall have shown ourselves daunted. You are rich, you gentlemen,--you can escape by flight, you can have vessels to wait for you at the mouths of the Loire and the Charente. Your country is everywhere, in many lands. But as for us poor peasants, we are tethered like the goats to the soil that feeds us; we would rather face death than exile."

"And your conclusion is, my brave Jean Oullier--"

"My conclusion is, Monsieur Petit-Pierre," said the Vendéan, "that when the wine is drawn it is best to drink it; we have taken arms, and having taken them, we ought to fight without delay."

"Let us fight!" cried Petit-Pierre, enthusiastically. "The voice of the people is the voice of God. I have faith in that of Jean Oullier."

"Let us fight!" echoed the marquis.

"Let us fight!" said Louis Renaud.

"Well then, what day shall we decide on for the first outbreak?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"Why," said Gaspard, "I thought it was decided for the 24th!"

"Yes; but these gentlemen in Paris have countermanded the order."

"Without informing you?" cried the marquis. "Don't they know that men are shot for less than that?"

"I forgave them," said Petit-Pierre, stretching out her hand. "Besides, those who did it are civilians, not soldiers."

"This counter-order and delay are most unfortunate," said Gaspard, in a low tone; "had I known of it--"

"What?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"I might not have agreed in the opinion of that peasant."

"Oh, nonsense!" cried Petit-Pierre; "you heard what he said, dear Gaspard,--when the wine is drawn it is best to drink it. Let us drink it gayly, gentlemen, even though it be that with which the lord of Beaumanoir refreshed himself at the fight of the gallant Thirty. Come, Marquis de Souday, find me pen, ink, and paper in this farmhouse where your future son-in-law has given me hospitality."

The marquis hastened to search for what Petit-Pierre wanted; and while opening drawers and closets and rummaging the clothes and linen of the farmer, he contrived to wring Jean Oullier's hand and whisper:--

"You talked gold, my brave gars; never one of your tally-hos rejoiced my heart like that 'boot-and-saddle' you've just rung out."

Then, having found what he wanted he carried it to Petit-Pierre. The latter dipped the pen into the ink-bottle, and in her firm, bold, large handwriting, she wrote as follows:--

My Dear Maréchal,--I remain among you. Be so good as to come to me.

I remain, inasmuch as my presence has already compromised many of my faithful followers, and it would be cowardice on my part to abandon them. Besides, I hope, in spite of this unfortunate counter-order, that God will grant us victory.

Farewell, Monsieur le maréchal; do not give in your resignation, for Petit-Pierre will not give in hers.

Petit-Pierre.

"And now," said Petit-Pierre, folding the letter, "what day shall we fix for the uprising?"

"Thursday, May 31," said the marquis, thinking that the nearest time was the best, "if that is satisfactory to you."

"No," said Gaspard; "excuse me, Monsieur le marquis, but it seems to me best to

choose the night of Sunday, the 3d to the 4th of June. On Sunday, after high mass, the peasants of all the parishes assemble in the porches of their different churches, and the captains will have an opportunity to communicate the order without exciting suspicion."

"Your knowledge of the manners and customs of this region is a great help, my friend," said Petit-Pierre, "and I agree to your advice. Let the date be therefore the night of the 3d to the 4th of June."

Whereupon, she began at once to write the following order:--

Having resolved not to leave the provinces of the West, but to confide myself to their fidelity,--a fidelity so often proved,--I rely upon you, monsieur, to take all necessary measures in your division for the call to arms which is appointed to take place during the night of the 3d and 4th of June.

I summon to my side all faithful hearts. God will help us to save the country; no danger, no fatigue, shall discourage me. I shall be present at the first engagement.

To this document Petit-Pierre signed her name as follows:--

MARIE-CAROLINE, Regent of France.

"There, the die is cast!" cried Petit-Pierre. "Now it remains to conquer or die."

"And now," added the marquis, "if twenty counter-orders are sent to me, I'll ring that tocsin on the 4th of June, and then--yes, damn it, after us the deluge!"

"One thing is absolutely necessary," said Petit-Pierre, showing her order. "This order must immediately and infallibly reach the various division commanders so as to neutralize the bad effects of the manifesto sent from Nantes."

"Alas!" said Gaspard; "God grant that luckless counter-order may reach the country districts in time to paralyze the first movement and yet leave vigor for the second. I fear the reverse; I am terribly afraid that many of our brave fellows will be the victims of their courage and their isolation."

"That is why I think we ought not to lose a moment, messieurs," said Petit-Pierre, "but use our legs while waiting to use our arms. You, Gaspard, inform the divisions of Upper and Lower Poitou. Monsieur le Marquis de Souday will do the same in the Retz and Mauges regions. You, my dear Louis Renaud, must explain it all to your Bretons. But who will undertake to carry my despatch to the maréchal? He is at Nantes; and your faces are far too well known there to allow me to send any of you on this errand."

"I will go," said Bertha, who had heard, in the alcove where she was resting with her sister, the sound of voices, and had risen to share in the discussion. "That is one of my functions as aide-de-camp."

"Certainly it is; but your dress, my dear child," replied Petit-Pierre, "will not meet the approval of the Nantes people, charming as I myself think it."

"Therefore my sister will not go to Nantes, Madame," said Mary, coming forward; "but I will, if you permit me. I can wear the dress of a peasant-woman, and leave your Royal Highness her first aide-de-camp."

Bertha wished to insist; but Petit-Pierre, whispering in her ear, said:--

"Stay, my dear Bertha; I have something to say to you about Baron Michel. We will plan a project he will not oppose, I am very sure."

Bertha blushed, lowered her head, and left her sister to take possession of the letter and convey it to Nantes.

VII.

HEREIN IS EXPLAINED HOW AND WHY BARON MICHEL DECIDED TO GO TO NANTES.

We have mentioned already, incidentally, that Michel had left the farmhouse; but we did not dwell sufficiently on this caper, nor on the circumstances that accompanied it.

For the first time in his life Michel acted slyly and even showed duplicity. Under the shock of emotion produced by Petit-Pierre's speech to the marquis, and by the vanishing (through Mary's unexpected declaration) of all the hopes he had been cherishing so complacently, he was utterly crushed down and annihilated. Fully aware that the fancy Bertha had so liberally shown for him separated him from her sister far more than any aversion on the sister's part, he reproached himself for having encouraged that fancy by his silence and his foolish timidity. But there was no use scolding himself now; he knew that in the depths of his soul he had not the necessary strength to cut short a misunderstanding which fatally interfered with an affection that was dearer to him than life itself. There was not in his nature resolution enough to bring the matter to a frank, categorical explanation; he felt it to be impossible to say to that handsome girl, to whom he had perhaps owed his life a few hours earlier, "Mademoiselle, it is not you whom I love."

During all that evening, although occasions to open his heart honestly to Bertha were not lacking,--for she, very uneasy about a wound which if given to herself she would hardly have noticed, persisted in dressing it,--Michel remained passive in a situation the difficulties of which increased every moment. He tried to speak to Mary; but Mary took as much pains to prevent this as he did to accomplish it, and he renounced the idea, which he indulged for a moment, of making her his intermediary. Besides, those fatal words, 'I do not love you,' sounded in his ears like a funeral knell.

He profited by a moment when no one, not even Bertha, had an eye upon him to retire, or rather to flee to his own room. There he flung himself on the straw bed which Bertha with her own white hands had prepared for him; but he soon got up, his head on fire, his heart more and more convulsed, to bathe his burning face in water and bind a wet towel round his head. This done, he profited by his sleeplessness to search for some method of release.

After an actual travail of imagination which lasted nearly an hour an idea came to him. It was this,--that he might have courage to write what he could not say. This, Michel felt, was the highest point his strength of character could reach. But in order to get any good out of such a letter he felt he could not be present in the house when Bertha received it and read the revelation of his secret thoughts; for not only do timid persons dread being made to suffer, but they also dread making others suffer.

The result of Michel's reflections was that he would leave the farmhouse; but not for long, be it understood; for he intended, as soon as the position was plainly defined and the ground cleared, to return and take his place beside the sister he really loved. The Marquis de Souday would surely not refuse him the hand of Mary, since he had given him that of Bertha, as soon as he was made aware that it was Mary and not Bertha whom he loved. The father could have no possible reason for refusal.

Much encouraged by this prospect, Michel rose and with profound ingratitude cast off the towel to which he owed (thanks to the quiet its cool refreshment had restored to his brain), the good idea he was now intent on putting into execution. He went down to the yard of the farmhouse and began to lift the bars at the stable entrance. But just as he had lifted and pushed back the first of these bars and was beginning on the second, he saw, under a shed, a bale of straw, and out of that bale of straw came a head which he recognized as that of Jean Oullier.

"The devil!" said the latter in his gruffest tone; "you are pretty early this morning, Monsieur Michel."

At that instant two o'clock rang from the steeple of a neighboring village.

"Have you any errand to do?" asked Jean Oullier.

"No," replied the baron, for he fancied that the Vendéan's eye could penetrate into the deepest recesses of his soul,--"no; but I have a dreadful headache, and I thought the night air might still it."

"I warn you that we have sentinels all around us, and if you have not the password

you may be roughly used."

"I!"

"Damn it! you as well as others. Ten steps from here you'll find out you are not the master of this house."

"But that password,--do you know it, Monsieur Jean?"

"Of course."

"Then tell me."

Jean Oullier shook his head.

"That's the Marquis de Souday's affair. Go up to his room; tell him you want to go away, and in order to do so you must have the password. He'll give it to you,--that is, if he thinks proper to do so."

Michel took good care to do nothing of the kind, and he remained standing where he was, with his hand on the bar. As for Jean Oullier, he again buried himself in the straw.

After a while Michel, wholly discomfited, went and sat down on an overturned trough, which formed a kind of seat at the inner gate of the farmyard. There he had leisure to continue his meditations; but although the pile of straw did not move again, Michel fancied that an aperture was made in its thickest part, and that in the depths of that cavity he could see something glitter, which was, doubtless, the eye of Jean Oullier. And alas! he knew there was no chance of eluding the eye of that watch-dog.

Luckily, as we have said, meditation was on this occasion singularly useful to the young baron. The question now was how to find a pretext to get away from Banl[oe]uvre in a proper manner. Michel was still seeking that pretext when the first rays of the rising sun began to light up the horizon and gild the thatch of the cottage-roof and color with its opal tints the panes of the narrow windows.

Little by little life was renewed around Michel. The cattle lowed for their food; the sheep, impatient for the fields, bleated and poked their gray-white muzzles through the bars of their pen; the hens fluttered down from their perches and stretched their wings and clucked on the manure heap; the pigeons came out of the cote and flew to the roof, to coo their hymn of love eternal; while the ducks, more prosaic, stood in a long line by the farmyard gate and filled the air with discordant noises,--noises which, in all probability, expressed their surprise at finding that gate closed when they were in such a hurry to go and dabble in the pond.

At the sound of these various noises, forming the matutinal concert of a well-managed farm, a window just above the bench on which Michel was sitting opened softly, and Petit-Pierre's head appeared within it. She did not, however, see Michel; her eyes were turned to heaven, and she seemed entirely absorbed either by inward thought or by the glorious spectacle the dawn presented to her. Any eye--above all, that of a princess unaccustomed to watch the rising of the sun--would have been dazzled by the jets of flame which the king of day was sending along the plain, where they sparkled like thousands of precious stones upon the wet and quivering leaves of the forest-trees and the dewy herbage of the fields; presently an invisible hand softly raised the veil of vapor from the valley, disclosing, one by one, like a modest virgin, its beauty, grace, and splendor.

Petit-Pierre gave herself up to the contemplation of this scene for several minutes. Then, resting her head on her hand, she murmured sadly:--

"Alas! bare as this poor cottage is, those who live in it are more fortunate than I."

These words struck the young baron's brain like a magic wand and elicited the idea, or rather the pretext, he had been vainly searching for the last two hours. He kept quite still against the wall, to which he had clung when the window opened, and he did not move until a sound told him the window was shut and he could leave his station without being seen.

He went straight to the shed.

"Monsieur," he said to Jean Oullier, "Petit-Pierre opened his window--"

"So I saw," said the Vendéan.

"He spoke; did you hear what he said?"

"It did not concern me, and therefore I did not listen."

"Being nearer to him, I heard what he said, without intending to listen."

"Well?"

"Well, our guest thinks this house unpleasant and inconvenient; it lacks many things which are a necessity to a person of his aristocratic habits. Couldn't you--I giving you the money, of course--couldn't you procure some of these necessary things?"

"Where, I should like to know?"

"Why, in the nearest town or village,--Légé or Machecoul."

Jean Oullier shook his head.

"Impossible," he said.

"Why so?" asked Michel.

"Because if I were to buy articles of luxury just now in either of those places, where not a gesture of certain persons is unobserved, I should awaken dangerous suspicion."

"Couldn't you go as far as Nantes?"

"No," said Jean Oullier, curtly; "the lesson I got at Montaigu has taught me prudence, and I shall not leave my post. But," he continued, in a slightly ironical tone, "you who want the fresh air to cure your headache,--why don't you go to Nantes?"

Seeing his scheme thus crowned with success, Michel blushed to the whites of his eyes; and yet he trembled, now that it came to putting it into execution.

"Perhaps you are right," he stammered; "but I am afraid, too."

"Pooh! a brave man like you ought to have no fear," said Jean Oullier, emerging from the straw, and shaking it off as he walked toward the gate, leaving the young man time to reflect.

"But--" said Michel.

"What?" asked Jean Oullier, impatiently.

"Will you undertake to explain the reasons of my departure to Monsieur le marquis, and present my excuses to--"

"Mademoiselle Bertha?" said Jean Oullier, sarcastically. "Yes; don't trouble yourself."

"I shall be back to-morrow," said Michel, as he passed through the gate.

"Don't hurry; take your time, Monsieur le baron. If not to-morrow, the next day will do." So saying, he closed the heavy gate behind the young man.

The sound of the gate barricaded against him gave a painful shock to Michel's heart. At that moment he thought less of the difficulties he was seeking to escape than of his total separation from the one he loved. It seemed to him that the worm-eaten gate was an iron barrier which he should ever find in future between the gentle form of Mary and himself.

So, instead of starting on his way, he again sat down, this time by the roadside, and wept. There was a moment when, if he had not feared Jean Oullier's sarcasms (inexperienced as he was, he could not be ignorant of the man's malevolence), he would have rapped on the gate and asked for re-admittance to see once more his tender Mary; but an inward impulse of--we were about to say false shame; let us rather say--true shame withheld him, and he at last departed, without very well knowing whither he went.

He was, however, on the road to Légé, and before long the sound of wheels made

him turn his head. He then saw the diligence which ran from Sables-d'Olonne to Nantes coming toward him. Michel felt that his strength, lessened by the loss of blood, though his wound was slight, would not enable him to walk much farther. The sight of the vehicle brought him to a resolution. He stopped it, got into one of the compartments, and reached Nantes a few hours later.

But when he got there all the melancholy of his situation came over him. Habituated from childhood to live the life of others, to obey a will that was not his own, and still maintained in that mental servitude by the very substitution that had just taken place within him,--having, as we may say, changed masters by abandoning his mother to follow the woman whom he loved,--liberty was to him so novel that he did not feel its charm, whereas his solitude and isolation were unbearable to him.

For hearts that are deeply wounded there is no such cruel solitude as that of a city; and the larger and more populous it is, the greater the solitude. Isolation in the midst of a crowd, the nearness of the joy and the heedlessness of those they meet, contrasting with the sadness and anxiety in their own minds, become unendurable to them. So it was now with Michel. Finding himself, almost without the action of his own will, on the road to Nantes, he hoped to find there some distraction to his anxious grief; on the contrary, he found it far more keen and agonizing, Mary's image followed him; he seemed to see her in every woman he met, and his heart dissolved into bitter regrets and impotent desires.

In this condition of mind he presently turned back to the inn at which the coach had stopped, where he shut himself up in a room and again began to weep. He thought of returning instantly to Banl[oe]uvre, flinging himself at Petit-Pierre's feet, and asking her to be his mediator between the two sisters. He blamed himself for not having done so that morning, and for weakly yielding to the fear of wounding Bertha's pride.

This current of ideas brought him naturally back to the object, or rather the pretext,

of his journey,--that is, the articles of luxury he had proposed to purchase. Those purchases once made,--to serve as a legitimate reason for his absence,--he would write the terrible letter which was, in truth, the one only and true cause of his flight to Nantes.

Presently he decided that he had better begin by writing that letter. This resolution taken, he did not lose a moment in carrying it out. He seated himself at the table and composed the following letter, on which fell as many tears from his eyes as words from his pen:--

MADEMOISELLE,--I ought to be the happiest of men, and yet my heart is broken, and I ask myself whether death were not more tolerable than the suffering I endure.

What will you think of me, what will you say when this letter tells you that which I can no longer conceal without being utterly unworthy of your goodness to me? I need the memory of that goodness, the certainty of the grandeur and generosity of your soul, but, above all, I need the thought that it is the being you love best in the world who separates us, before I can summon courage to take this step.

Mademoiselle, I love your sister Mary; I love her with all the power of my heart; I love her so that I do not wish to live--I cannot live without her! I love her so much that at this moment, when I am guilty toward you of what a less noble character than yours might perhaps consider a cruel wrong, I stretch to you my supplicating hands and say: Let me hope that I may obtain the right to love you as a brother loves a sister!

It was not until this letter was folded and sealed that Michel thought of how it might be made to reach Bertha. No one in Nantes could be sent with it; the danger was too great either for a faithful messenger, or for themselves if the messenger were treacherous. The only means he could think of was to return to the country and find some peasant in the neighborhood of Machecoul on whose fidelity he could rely, and wait himself in the forest for the reply on which his future hung. This was the

plan on which he decided.

He spent the remainder of the evening in making the different purchases for the comfort of Petit-Pierre, which he packed in a valise, putting off till the next morning the buying of a horse,--an acquisition which was necessary to him in future if he was, as he hoped, to continue the campaign he had already begun.

The next day, about nine o'clock in the morning, Michel, mounted on an excellent Norman beast, with his valise behind him, was preparing to start on his way back to the Retz region.

VIII.

THE SHEEP, RETURNING TO THE FOLD, TUMBLES INTO A PIT-FALL.

It was market-day, and the influx of countrymen was considerable in the streets and along the quays of Nantes. At the moment when Michel reached the pont Rousseau the road was blocked by a compact line of heavy vehicles loaded with grain, carts heaped with vegetables, horses, mules, peasants, and peasant-women, all carrying in baskets, hods, or tin-pails the produce they were bringing to the town.

Michel's impatience was so great that he did not hesitate to plunge into the midst of the crowd; but just as he was pushing his horse into it he caught sight of a young girl leaving it in a direction opposite to his own course, and something in her aspect made him quiver.

She was dressed, like other peasant-women, in a blue-and-red striped petticoat and a cotton mantle with a hood to it; her head was covered by a coif, with falling lappets of the commonest kind. Nevertheless, in spite of this humble costume, she closely resembled Mary,--so closely that the young baron could not restrain a cry of astonishment.

He tried to turn back; but, unfortunately, the commotion he made in the crowd by the stopping and turning of his horse raised such a storm of oaths and cries that he

had no courage to brave it. He let his beast continue its way, swearing to himself at the obstacles which hindered his advance. Once over the bridge, however, he jumped from his horse and looked about for some one to hold it, while he went back to see if his eyes had deceived him, or whether it were possible that Mary had come to Nantes.

At that instant a voice, nasal like that of all the beggars of that region, asked alms of him. He turned quickly, for he thought he knew the voice. Leaning against the last post of the bridge were two individuals, whose countenances were far too marked and characteristic to have escaped his memory. They were Aubin Courte-Joie and Trigaud-Vermin, who, apparently, were there for no other purpose than to work upon the pity of the crowd, though, in all probability, they had some object not foreign to the political and commercial interests of Maître Jacques.

Michel went eagerly up to them.

"You know me?" he asked.

Aubin Courte-Joie winked.

"My good monsieur," he said, "have pity on a poor cartman who has had both legs crushed under the wheels of his cart, coming down the hill by the springs of Baugé."

"Yes, yes, my good man," said Michel, understanding instantly.

He went close up to the pair as he gave them alms, and the alms were a piece of gold, which he slipped into the capacious paw of Trigaud-Vermin.

"I am here by order of Petit-Pierre," he said, in a low voice, to the false and the real mendicant; "hold my horse for a few moments while I do an important errand."

The cripple made a sign of assent. Baron Michel tossed the bridle of the horse to Trigaud and turned to re-cross the bridge. Unfortunately for him, if the passage was difficult for a horseman, it was still more difficult for a foot-passenger. Michel in vain attempted some assumption, and tried to make his timid nature more

aggressive. He punched with his elbows, and glided where he could through interstices; he risked his life a dozen times under the wheels of hay-carts and cabbage-carts, but finally he was forced to resign himself to follow the stream and go with the torrent, though it was evident the young peasant-woman would be far out of sight by the time he reached the place where he had seen her.

He thought, sagaciously enough, that she must, like other peasant-women, have gone toward the market, and he took that direction, looking at all the countrywomen he passed with an anxious curiosity that earned him some jests and came near causing a quarrel or two. None of them was she whom he sought. He rushed through the market and the adjacent streets, but saw nothing that recalled to him the graceful apparition he had seen on the bridge.

Completely discouraged, he was thinking of returning on his steps and remounting his horse, when, as he turned the corner of the rue du Château he saw, not twenty steps distant from him, the identical petticoat of blue-and-red stripes and the very cotton mantle of which he was in search. The carriage and step of the woman who wore that dress had all the elegance of Mary's own bearing. It was surely her slender and delicate form the outline of which he saw through the folds of the coarse material she wore. Those were the curves of her graceful neck, which made the lappets of her common coif an adornment; and the knot of hair which came below the coif, surely it was braided of the same fair golden hair which Michel had so often admired.

No, he could not be deceived; that young peasant-woman and Mary were one and the same person, and Michel was so sure of it that he dared not pass her and look into her face as he had into that of others. He contented himself by simply crossing the street. The result of that strategic movement assured him he was not mistaken.

But why was Mary in Nantes; and being there, why was she thus disguised? These questions Michel put to himself without being able to solve them, and he was, after a

violent struggle with himself, just about to approach the young girl and speak to her, when he saw her stop at No. 17 of this very rue du Château, push the gate of the house, and as the gate was not locked, pass through it, enter an alley, close the gate behind her, and disappear.

Michel went eagerly to the gate; but it was now locked. He stood before it in deep and painful stupefaction, not knowing what to do next, and half-inclined to believe he was dreaming.

Suddenly he felt a tap upon his arm; he shuddered, so far was his mind at that moment from his body. Then he turned round. The notary, Loriot, was beside him.

"You here!" exclaimed the latter, in a tone that denoted surprise.

"Is there anything so very astonishing in my being at Nantes, Maître Loriot?" asked Michel.

"Come, speak lower, and don't stand before that door as if you had taken root there; I advise you not."

"Goodness! what's the matter with you? I knew you were cautious, but not to that extent."

"One can't be too cautious. Come, let's talk as we walk; then we sha'n't be remarked upon." Passing his handkerchief over his face, which was bathed in perspiration, he added, "Though it will compromise me horribly."

"I swear, Maître Loriot, I don't know what you are talking about," exclaimed Michel.

"You don't understand what I mean, unfortunate young man? Don't you know that you are down on the list of suspected persons, and that a warrant has been issued for your arrest?"

"Well, let them arrest me!" cried Michel, impatiently, trying to turn the notary back toward the house into which Mary had disappeared.

"Arrest you! Hey! you take it gayly enough, Monsieur Michel. All right; call it philosophy. I ought to tell you that this same news, which seems to you so unimportant, has produced such a dreadful effect upon your mother that if chance had not thrown you in my way here I should have gone immediately to Légé to find you."

"My mother!" cried the young man, whom the notary was touching on his weak spot,--"what has happened to my mother?"

"Nothing has happened, Monsieur Michel. Thank Heaven, she is as well as persons can be when their minds are full of uneasiness and their hearts of grief. I must not conceal from you that that is your mother's condition at this moment."

"Good God! what do you mean?" said Michel, sighing dolefully.

"You know what you are to her, Monsieur Michel; you can't have forgotten the care she took of your youth, and the solicitude she continues to bestow upon you, though you are now of an age when lads begin to slip through their mother's fingers. You can, therefore, imagine what her tortures are in knowing that you are exposed every day to the terrible dangers that surround you. I do not conceal from you that I considered it my duty to inform her of what I suppose to be your intentions, and I have fulfilled that duty."

"Oh, what have you said to her, Maître Loriot?"

"I told her, in plain language, that I believed you to be desperately in love with Mademoiselle Bertha de Souday--"

"Goodness!" exclaimed Michel; "he, too!"

"And," continued the notary, without noticing the interruption, "that, to all appearance, you intend to marry her."

"What did my mother say?" asked Michel, with visible anxiety.

"Just what all mothers say when they hear of a marriage they disapprove. But come,

let me question you myself, my young friend; my position as notary of both families ought to give me some influence with you. Have you seriously reflected on what you are about to do?"

"Do you share my mother's prejudices?" demanded Michel. "Do you know anything against the reputation of the Demoiselles de Souday?"

"Nothing whatever, my young friend," replied Maître Loriot, while Michel gazed anxiously at the windows of the house into which Mary had entered,--"nothing whatever! On the contrary, I consider those young ladies, whom I have known from childhood, as among the purest and most virtuous in the land, in spite of the malicious nickname a few evil tongues have applied to them."

"Then," said Michel, "why is it you disapprove of what I do?"

"My young friend," said the notary, "please observe that I have given no opinion; I simply advise prudence. You will have to make three times as much effort to succeed in what must be called from a certain point of view--pray excuse the word--a folly, as it would cost you to renounce the attachment now; though I don't say but what the fine qualities of the young lady justify it."

"My dear Monsieur Loriot," said Michel, who at a safe distance from his mother was not sorry to burn his vessels, "the Marquis de Souday has been so good as to grant me his daughter's hand; there's no getting over that."

"Oh, that indeed is another thing," said Maître Loriot. "If you have reached that point in the affair, I have only one word to say and one advice to give. Remember that it is always a serious matter legally to marry in defiance of the will of parents. Persist in your intention; that's very right. But go and see your mother; don't give her the chance to complain of your neglect. Try to overcome her prejudices."

"Hum!" muttered Michel, who felt the wisdom of these remarks.

"Come," persisted Loriot, "will you promise me to do as I ask you?"

"Yes, yes!" replied the young man, who wanted to get rid of the notary, for he thought he heard steps in the alley, and feared that Mary might come out while Maître Loriot was there.

"Good!" said the latter. "Remember, also, that you are safer at La Logerie than elsewhere. Your mother's name and influence with the administration can alone save you from the consequences of your late conduct. You have been, committing various pranks for some time past which no one would have suspected you to be capable of; you must admit that, young man."

"Yes, yes; I admit it," cried Michel, impatiently.

"That's all I want. The sinner who confesses is half-repentant. There! now I must say good-bye; I leave Nantes at eleven o'clock."

"Are you going back to Légé?"

"Yes; with a young lady who is to meet me presently at my hotel, and to whom I am to give a seat in my cabriolet, which I would otherwise offer to you."

"You would go out of your way a mile or two to do me a service, wouldn't you?"

"Of course; with the greatest pleasure, my dear Monsieur Michel," said the notary.

"Then, go by way of Banl[oe]uvre, and give this letter to Mademoiselle Bertha."

"So be it; but for God's sake," cried the notary, with a frightened look, "be more cautious in your way of handing it to me."

"I notice you are not yourself, my dear Monsieur Loriot; when those people passed us just now you jumped off the pavement as if they had the plague. What's the matter with you? Come, Mr. Notary, speak up!"

"I'd change my practice at this very moment for the poorest practice in the Sarthe or the Eure departments. I feel such terrible emotions that if they go on much longer my days will be numbered; that's what's the matter with me. Monsieur Michel," continued the notary, lowering his voice, "think of it; they have put four pounds of

gunpowder in my pockets, against my will. I tremble as I walk along the pavement; every cigar that comes along puts me into a fever. Well, good-bye; take my advice and go back to La Logerie."

Michel, whose agonies, like those of Maître Loriot, grew worse and worse, let the notary depart, having got from him all he wanted,--namely, the certainty that his letter would reach Baul[oe]uvre. No sooner was Loriot out of sight than his eyes, returning naturally to the house he was watching, fixed themselves on a window where he fancied he saw the curtain move, and the vague silhouette of a face looking at him through the glass. He thought it might be on account of his persistency in standing before the house that the young girl watched him; he therefore moved in the direction of the river, and hid behind the angle of a house, not, however, losing sight of all that happened in the rue du Château.

Presently the gate of No. 17 opened, and the same young peasant-girl appeared; but she was not alone. A young man, dressed in a long blouse, and affecting rustic manners, accompanied her. Rapidly as they passed him, Michel noticed that the man was young, and the distinction of his face was in marked contrast to his peasant's clothes; he saw, too, that he was jesting with Mary on a footing of equality, offering, apparently, to carry her basket,--an attention the young girl was refusing, with a laugh.

The serpents of jealousy gnawed his heart. Convinced, as he remembered what Mary had whispered to him, that these disguises hid some amorous as well as some political intrigue, he rushed away toward the Rousseau bridge, which lay in exactly the opposite direction to that taken by Mary and her friend. The crowd on the bridge was no longer so great. He crossed it easily; but when he reached the further end, and began to look round for Courte-Joie, Trigaud, and his horse, all three had disappeared.

Michel was so upset in mind that it did not occur to him to search the neighborhood.

Remembering, too, what the notary had said, he thought it would be dangerous to lodge a complaint, which might bring about his own arrest, and reveal, besides, his acquaintance with the two mendicants. He therefore made up his mind to do nothing to recover his horse, but to go home on foot; and he accordingly took his way toward Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu.

Cursing Mary, and shedding tears over the betrayal of which he believed himself the victim, he had no other thought than to do as Maître Loriot advised,--that is to say, return to La Logerie and fling himself into the arms of his mother, toward whom the sight he had just seen impelled him far more than the remonstrances of the notary.

Thus preoccupied, he reached the height of Saint-Corentin without hearing the footsteps of two gendarmes who were walking behind him.

"Your papers, monsieur," said one of them, a corporal, after examining him from head to foot.

"My papers?" exclaimed Michel, in astonishment, the inquiry being addressed to him for the first time in his life,--"I have none."

"And why have you none?"

"Because I never supposed that any passport was required to come from my house into Nantes."

"Where is your house?"

"It is the château de la Logerie."

"What is your name?"

"Baron Michel."

"Baron Michel de la Logerie?"

"Yes."

"If you are Baron Michel de la Logerie, I arrest you," said the corporal.

Then, without more ado, and before the young man could think of flight, which from

the nature of the ground was quite possible, the corporal collared him, while the other gendarme, minion of equality before the law, slipped the hand-cuffs on his wrists.

This operation over,--and it lasted only a few seconds, thanks to the stupefaction of the prisoner and the dexterity of the gendarme,--the two agents of the armed forces conducted Baron Michel to Saint-Colombin, where they locked him into a sort of cellar, belonging to the barracks of the troops stationed there, which was used as a temporary prison.

IX.

TRIGAUD PROVES THAT IF HE HAD BEEN HERCULES, HE WOULD PROBABLY HAVE ACCOMPLISHED TWENTY-FOUR LABORS INSTEAD OF TWELVE.

It was about four in the afternoon when Michel, thrust into the lock-up of the guard-house at Saint-Colombin, became aware of the delights of that abode. On entering what seemed to be a dungeon, the young man's eyes, accustomed to the brilliant light without, could distinguish nothing around him. Little by little they grew accustomed to the darkness, and then their owner was able to make out the sort of lodging he was in.

It was partly under and partly above the surface of the ground; its walls were of thicker and more solidly constructed masonry than was usual in such buildings, for the reason that it supported the walls of the house above it. The floor was bare earth; and as the place was very damp, that earth was nearly mud. The ceiling was of beams, placed very near together. The light usually entered through a grating placed just above the level of the ground; but owing to the necessities of its present use this aperture was closed inside by heavy planks, and outside by an enormous millstone placed vertically in front of it. A hole in the centre of the stone gave entrance to a feeble ray of light, of which two thirds was intercepted by the plank shutters, so that

it only cast a single weird gleam into the middle of the cellar.

In the track of that gleam lay the fragments of a cider-press,--that is to say, the branch of a tree squared at one end, and now half-rotten, and a circular trough of free-stone decorated with silvery arabesques by the slimy and capricious promenades of slugs and snails.

To any other prisoner than Michel the inspection of his surroundings might have seemed desperately discouraging, for it plainly showed there were few, if any, chances of escape; but the young baron was moved to make it by nothing more than a feeling of vague curiosity. The first anguish his heart had ever felt plunged him into a state of prostration where the soul is indifferent to all outside things; and in the first shock of discovering that he must renounce the sweet hope of being loved by Mary, palace or prison were alike to him.

He sat down on the edge of the trough, wondering who could be the young man he had seen with Mary; then, after the violence of his jealous transports subsided, he turned to recollections of his first intercourse with the sisters. But his anguish was as great from the one emotion as from the other; for, says the Florentine poet, that great painter of infernal torture, "There is no greater pain than to recall a happy time in wretchedness."

But let us now leave the young baron to his grief, and see what was happening in other parts of the guard-house of Saint-Colombin.

This guard-house, materially speaking, which had been occupied for the last few days by a detachment of troops of the line, was a vast building, with a front toward the courtyard, while its rear looked out upon the country road that leads from Saint-Colombin to Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu, about a kilometre from the first of these two villages and a stone's throw from the high-road between Nantes and the Sables-d'Olonne.

This building, constructed on the ruins and with the fragments of an old feudal

fortress, occupied an eminence that commanded the whole neighborhood. The advantages of the position had struck Dermoncourt as he returned from his expedition to the forest of Machecoul. Accordingly, he left a score of men to hold it. It answered the purpose of a block-house, where expeditionary columns could find, on occasion, a resting-place or a refuge, and at the same time it might be made a sort of station for prisoners, where they could be collected until a sufficiently imposing force was mustered to escort them to Nantes, without danger of rescue.

The accommodations of the guard-house consisted solely of a somewhat vast hall and a barn. The hall, over the cellar in which Michel was confined, and consequently five or six feet above the ground, served as the guard-room. It was reached by a flight of steps, made with the old stones of the fortress, placed parallel with the wall.

The barn was used as barracks for the men; they slept there on straw. The post was guarded with all military precautions. A sentry stood before the gate of the courtyard which opened to the road, and a lookout was stationed in an ivy-covered tower, the sole remains left standing of the old feudal castle.

Now, about six o'clock in the evening, the soldiers who formed the little garrison were seated on some heavy rollers which had been left at the foot of the outside wall of the house. It was a favorite spot for their siesta; there they enjoyed the gentle warmth of the setting sun and a splendid view of the lake of Grand-Lieu in the distance, the surface of which, tinted by the beams of the star of day, resembled at that hour an immense sheet of scarlet tin. At their feet ran the road to Nantes, like a broad ribbon through the midst of the verdure which at that season covered the plain; and we must admit that our heroes in red trousers were more interested in what happened on that road than in all the beauties which Nature spread before them.

On the evening of which we write, the laborers leaving the fields, the flocks

returning to their stables made the road a somewhat lively and varied panorama. Each heavy hay-cart, each group returning from the Nantes market, and, above all, every peasant-woman in her short skirt was a text for remark and jocularity, which, it must be owned, were not restrained.

"Goodness!" cried one of the men, suddenly, "what's that I see down there?"

"A fellow with bagpipes," said another.

"Bagpipes, indeed! Do you think you are still in Brittany? Down here they don't groan bagpipes; they only whine complaints."

"What has he got on his back, then, if it isn't his instrument?"

"That's an instrument, sure enough," said a fourth soldier; "it must be an organ."

"Queer organ!" said a fifth. "I tell you that's a sack; the man's a beggar. You can tell him by his clothes."

"Then his sack has eyes and a nose, like the rest of us. Why, look at him, Limousin!"

"Limousin's arm is long, but his sight is short," said another; "you can't have everything."

"Pooh!" said the corporal; "I see what it is. It is one man carrying another on his shoulders."

"The corporal is right!" chorused the soldiers.

"I am always right," said he of the woollen stripes, "first as your corporal, next as your superior; and if there are any of you who doubt after I have once said a thing, he is going to be convinced now, for here come the men straight toward us."

As he spoke, the tramp who had roused the discussion (in whom our readers have no doubt recognized Trigaud-Vermin, as in his bagpipe, organ, or sack, they have also recognized his rider, Aubin Courte-Joie) turned off the main-road to the left, and came up the flight of steps which led to the guard-house.

"What a pair of brigands!" said one of the soldiers. "If they caught us alone, behind a

hedge, either of those rascals would clip us a shot, wouldn't he, corporal?"

"Like enough," responded the latter.

"But as we are all here together they come and beg,--ha, the cowards!"

"I'll be shot if I give 'em a penny," said the soldier who had spoken first.

"See here!" said another, picking up a stone; "I'll put something into his hat."

"I forbid you," said the corporal.

"Why so?"

"Because he hasn't any hat."

The soldiers burst out laughing at the joke, which was recognized at once as very choice.

"Let's have a look," said a soldier, "at what the fellow is really carrying; don't discourage him. For my part, I don't find such delight in this beggarly guard-house that I despise any sort of fun that comes along."

"Fun?"

"Yes, any kind,--music perhaps. Every tramp in this region is a sort of troubadour. We'll make him sing what he knows, and a good deal he doesn't know; it will help pass the evening."

By this time the mendicant, now no longer an enigma to the soldiers, was close beside them, holding out his hand.

"You were right, corporal; he has got another man perched on his shoulders."

"I was wrong," responded the corporal.

"How so?"

"That isn't a man,-—only a section of humanity."

The soldiers laughed at the second joke as heartily as they laughed at the first.

"He can't spend much on trousers," said one.

"And less for boots," added the facetious corporal.

"Aren't they hideous?" said the Limousin. "Upon my word, you might think 'em a monkey mounted on a bear."

While these poor waggeries were flying about and reaching Trigaud's ear, he stood immovable, holding out his hand and giving a most pitiable expression to his face, while Aubin Courte-Joie, in his capacity as orator of the association, repeated, in his nasal voice, the unvarying formula:--

"Charity, if you please, my good gentlemen!--charity for a poor cartman with both legs taken off by his cart, coming down the hill at Ancenis."

"What ignorant savages they must be to expect alms of soldiers in garrison. Scamps! I'll bet if we searched their pockets we'd find double what we have got in our own."

Hearing which suggestion, Aubin Courte-Joie modified the formula, and came down to a precise request:--

"A bit of bread, just a bit of bread, if you please, my good gentlemen," he said. "If you haven't any money you have surely a bit of bread."

"Bread!" said the corporal. "Yes, you shall have bread, my good man; and with the bread, soup, and with the soup a bit of meat. We'll do that for you; but I should like to know what you'll do for us."

"My good gentlemen, I'll pray God for you," replied Courte-Joie, in his nasal whine, which formed the treble to his partner's bass.

"That will do no harm," said the corporal,--"no, certainly, there's no harm in that; but it isn't enough. Come, haven't you anything funny in your sack?"

"How do you mean?" asked Courte-Joie, assuming ignorance.

"I mean, villanous old black-birds that you are, you must be able to whistle an air or two; in which case, let's have the music first. That will pay for the soup and the bread and the meat."

"Ah, yes, yes; I understand. Well, we don't refuse. On the contrary, officer," said Aubin, flattering the corporal, "it is fair enough that if you give us the charity of the good God we should try to amuse you and your company as best we can."

"Good; the more the better. You can't go too far, for we are dying of dulness in your devilish land."

"All right," said Courte-Joie; "we'll begin by showing you something you never saw before."

Although the promise was nothing more than the usual exordium of clowns at a circus, it roused the curiosity of the soldiers, who clustered round the mendicants in silence, with an eagerness that was almost respectful. Courte-Joie, who until then had kept his seat on Trigaud's shoulders, made a movement of his body, indicating that he wished to be deposited on the ground, and Trigaud, with that passive obedience which he practised to the will of his master, seated him on a fragment of the old battlement half-buried in nettles, which lay near the rollers on which the men were seated.

"Hey! how neatly that was done!" cried the corporal. "I'd like to recruit that fellow and turn him over to the fat major, who can't find a cob fit to carry him."

During this time Courte-Joie had picked up a stone, which he gave to Trigaud. The latter, without further directions, closed and then opened his hand, showing the stone reduced to fragments.

"Good Lord! he's a Hercules! You must tackle him, Pinguet," said the corporal, addressing the soldier we have hitherto called the Limousin.

"All right," said the latter, jumping up; "we'll see about it."

Trigaud, taking no notice of the words or actions of Pinguet, continued his exercises. He seized two soldiers by the straps of their knapsacks, gently raised and held them aloft at arm's-length for a few seconds, and then as gently put them down, with perfect ease.

The soldiers cheered him loudly.

"Pinguet! Pinguet!" they cried, "where are you? Here's some one who can knock you into a cocked-hat."

Trigaud continued his performances as if these experiments on his strength were a pre-arranged matter. He invited two other soldiers to seat themselves astride of the shoulders of the first two, and he carried all four with almost as much ease as if there were but two. As he put them down, Pinguet arrived with a gun on each shoulder.

"Bravo, Limousin! bravo!" cried the soldiers.

Encouraged by the acclamations of his comrades, Pinguet cried out:--

"All that is mountebank business. Here, you braggart, let me see you do what I am going to do."

Putting a finger of each hand into the muzzle of a gun, he held the weapons out before him, at arm's-length.

"Pooh!" said Courte-Joie, while Trigaud looked on with a movement of the lips that might pass for a smile at Pinguet's feat,--"pooh! bring two more guns."

When the guns were brought Trigaud put all four muzzles on the fingers of one hand and raised them to the level of his eye, without any contraction of the muscles that betrayed an effort. Pinguet was distanced forever in the struggle.

Then rummaging in his pocket, Trigaud brought out a horse-shoe, which he folded in two as easily as an ordinary man would fold a leather strap. After each of his experiments he turned his eyes to Courte-Joie, asking for a smile; then Courte-Joie would signify by a nod that he was satisfied.

"Come," said Aubin, "you've only earned our suppers so far; now you must get us a night's lodging. Isn't that so, my good gentlemen? If my comrade does something more wonderful still, won't you give us a little hay and a corner in the stable to lie on?"

"As for that, it is impossible," said the sergeant of the company, who, being attracted by the shouts and plaudits of the soldiers, had come to share the sight; "the orders are strict."

This answer seemed to discourage Courte-Joie greatly; his weasel-face grew serious.

"Never mind," said one of the men; "we'll club together, and get you ten sous, which will pay for a bed at the nearest tavern, and that will be softer than buckwheat hay."

"If the ox you ride has legs as solid as his arms," said another, "a mile or two farther won't trouble you."

"First, let's see the performance!" cried the soldiers. "Show us his best thing."

There was no repelling this enthusiasm, and Courte-Joie yielded with an alacrity which showed his confidence in his comrade's biceps.

"Have you a grindstone here, or anything that weighs about twelve or fifteen hundred pounds?" he asked.

"There's the block of stone you are sitting on," said a soldier.

Courte-Joie shrugged his shoulders.

"If that stone had a handle Trigaud would pick it up for you with one hand."

"There's that millstone we tipped up before the grating of the dungeon," said a soldier.

"Why not tell him to lift the whole building at once?" said the corporal. "It took six of you men to put it where it is, and with levers, too. I was furious that my rank forbade me from lending a hand to what I called a pack of idlers."

"Besides, you must not touch that millstone," interposed the sergeant; "that's also against orders. There's a prisoner in the cellar."

Courte-Joie gave Trigaud a glance, and the latter, paying no attention to the sergeant's remark, went straight to the millstone.

"Don't you hear me?" said the sergeant, raising his voice, and catching Trigaud by

the arm; "you are not to touch it."

"Why not?" said Courte-Joie. "If he moves it he'll replace it; don't be afraid."

"Besides," said a soldier, "if you look at the mouse they have got in the trap you'll see it would never run away if it could,--a poor little monsieur who might be taken for a woman in disguise. I thought at first he was the Duchesse de Berry herself."

"Yes, and he's too busy crying to think of escape," said the corporal, who was evidently burning with the desire to see the feat. "When we took him his food, Pinguet and I,--that is, I and Pinguet,--he burst into tears; I declare if his eyes weren't two faucets!"

"Well, well," said the sergeant, who was no less curious than the rest to see how the tramp would accomplish his Titanic task, "I will take the responsibility of allowing it."

Trigaud profited by the permission. He seized the millstone between his arms at its base, leaned his shoulder on its centre, and with a powerful effort tried to raise it. But the weight of this enormous mass of stone had sunk it into the ground on which it rested to the depth of some four or five inches, and the adherence of this earth socket, thus hollowed, neutralized Trigaud's efforts.

Courte-Joie, who had entered the circle of soldiers by creeping on his hands and knees, like a huge scarab[oe]us, called attention to the nature of the difficulty; then with a large flat stone which he picked up, and partly also with his hands, he grubbed out the earth which hindered the success of Trigaud's feat. The giant then applied himself once more to the work. Soon he raised the huge block and held it up for a few seconds, resting against his shoulder and also against the wall, about a foot from the ground.

The enthusiasm of the soldiers knew no bounds. They pressed around Trigaud and overwhelmed him with congratulations to which he seemed perfectly insensible; they shouted in frantic admiration, which was shared by the corporal, and then,

through the natural hierarchy of rank, by the sergeant himself. They talked of carrying Trigaud in triumph to the sutler's, where the reward of his vigor awaited him, swearing by every oath known to the sons of Mars that Trigaud deserved not only the bread and soup and meat promised by the corporal, but the rations of a general, or indeed of the king of France, which would be none too much to maintain the strength required for such prowess.

As we have said, Trigaud seemed in no way puffed-up by his triumph; his countenance remained as impassible as that of an ox allowed to breathe after some powerful exertion. His eyes, however, sought those of Aubin Courte-Joie, as if to ask "Master, are you satisfied?"

Courte-Joie, on the other hand, looked radiant, possibly because of the impression made upon the spectators by a strength he considered his own, though it far exceeded that which Nature had originally bestowed upon him. Perhaps, however, his satisfaction was really caused by the success of a little man[oe]uvre he had cleverly performed while the attention of all was concentrated on his companion,--a man[oe]uvre which consisted in slipping under the millstone the large flat stone he held in his hand, placing it in such a way that the enormous mass which closed the grating of the cellar was so poised upon its smooth surface that the strength of a child would suffice to displace it.

The two beggars were taken to the sutler's, and there Trigaud furnished still another text of admiration to the soldiers. After he had swallowed an enormous canful of soup, four rations of beef and two loaves of bread were placed before him. Trigaud ate the first loaf with the first two rations; then, as if by changing his method of deglutition he changed and improved the taste of the objects swallowed, he took his second loaf, split it in two, scooped out and ate, by way of pastime, the crumb within it, placed the meat in the cavity, put the two halves of the crust together, and proceeded to bite through the whole with a coolness and force of jaw which brought

down thunders of applause from the delighted audience.

After about five minutes of this exercise nothing remained of either bread or meat but a few crumbs of the loaf, which Trigaud, apparently ready to begin all over again, carefully collected. His admirers hastened to bring him a third loaf, which, though stale and dry, Trigaud treated like the first two.

The soldiers were not yet satisfied; they would have liked to push their investigations still further, but the sergeant thought it more prudent to bring their scientific curiosity to an end. Courte-Joie had now become thoughtful, and his expression was noticed by the soldiers.

"Ah, ça!" said the corporal; "here you are, eating and drinking on the earnings of your comrade. That's not fair; it seems to me you might give us a song, if only to pay your scot."

"Unquestionably," said the sergeant.

"Yes, yes, a song!" cried the soldiers, "and then the affair will be complete."

"Hum!" muttered Courte-Joie. "I know some songs, of course I do."

"All right then, sing away!"

"But my songs mayn't be to your liking."

"Never mind,--so long as it isn't a fugue for the devil's funeral, anything will be fun to us; we are not hard to please at Saint-Colombin."

"Yes," said Courte-Joie, "I can see that; you are horribly bored."

"Monstrously," said the sergeant.

"We don't expect you to sing like Monsieur Nourrit," observed a Parisian.

"Make it a bit quizzical," said another man, "and the more the better."

"As I have eaten your bread and drunk your wine," said Courte-Joie, "I have no right to refuse you anything; but, I repeat it, my songs will probably not be to your taste."

And thereupon, he trolled out the following stanza:--

"Look! look! my gars, down there! down there! Don't you see the infernal band? Spread out, spread out, surprise them there, Behind the gorse, across the land. Spread out! I say, my gars! my gars! Await the Blues with steady hand."

Courte-Joie got no farther. After a moment of surprised silence at his first words a roar of indignation arose; ten soldiers sprang upon him and the sergeant, seizing him by the collar, threw him on the ground.

"Villain!" he cried, "I'll teach you to come here in our midst and sing praises to your brigands."

But before the words were well out of his mouth (words to which he added a variety of adverbs that were customary with him) Trigaud, his eyes flashing with anger, made his way through to Courte-Joie, pushed back the sergeant and stood before his comrade in so threatening an attitude that the soldiers remained for some moments silent and uncertain.

But soon, mortified at being held at bay by an unarmed man, they drew their sabres, and rushed upon the beggars.

"Kill them! kill them!" they cried; "they are Chouans!"

"You asked me for a song; I warned you that the songs I knew were not to your taste," cried Courte-Joie, in a voice that rose high above the tumult. "You ought not to have insisted. Why do you complain?"

"If you only knew such songs as you have just sung you are a rebel, and I arrest you peremptorily."

"I know such songs as please the people of the towns and villages whose alms are my living. A poor cripple like me and an idiot like my comrade can't be dangerous. Arrest us if you choose; but such captures won't do you any honor."

"That may be," replied the sergeant, "but meantime you'll sleep in the lock-up. You

were puzzled where to go for a night's lodging, my fine fellow; well, I'll give you one. Come, men, seize and search them, and let us lock them up incontinently."

But, as Trigaud still maintained a threatening attitude, no one hastened to execute the sergeant's order.

"If you don't go with a good grace," said the latter, "I'll send for some loaded muskets, and we will see if your skin is bullet-proof."

"Come, Trigaud, my lad," said Courte-Joie, "if we must resign ourselves, we must; besides, it can't matter, they won't detain us long. Their fine prisons are not built for poor devils like us."

"That's right," said the sergeant, much pleased at the pacific turn the affair was taking. "You will be searched, and if nothing suspicious is found upon you, and you behave properly during the night, we'll see about letting you out to-morrow morning."

The two beggars were searched, but nothing was found upon them except a few copper coins; which confirmed the sergeant in his ideas of clemency.

"After all," he said, pointing to Trigaud, "that great ox is not guilty; I see no reason why I should lock him up."

"If you do," said the Limousin, "he might take it into his head, like his forefather Samson, to shake the walls and bring them down about our ears."

"You are right, Pinguet," said the sergeant, "because that's my opinion, too. We should only embarrass ourselves by holding the pair. Come, off with you, friend, and quick too!"

"Oh! my good monsieur, don't separate us," cried Courte-Joie, in a tearful voice. "We can't do without each other; he walks for me, and I think for him."

"Upon my word," said a soldier, "they are worse than lovers."

"No," said the sergeant to Courte-Joie. "I shall make you pass the night in the

dungeon to punish you, and tomorrow the officer of the day will decide what is to be done with your carcass. Come, to the cellar!"

Two soldiers approached Courte-Joie; but he with an agility not to be expected in so helpless a body, sprang upon Trigaud's shoulders, and the giant walked peacefully along toward the door of the dungeon, under escort of the soldiers.

On the way Aubin put his lips close to the ear of his comrade and said some words in a low voice. Trigaud deposited his master at the cellar-door, through which the sergeant thrust the cripple, who made his entrance by rolling forward like an enormous ball.

The soldiers then took Trigaud outside the courtyard gate, which they closed behind him. The giant stood for a few moments motionless and bewildered, as if he did not know what course to decide upon. He tried at first to sit down on the rollers, where, as we have seen, the soldiers took their siesta. But the sentry made him understand that that was impossible, and the beggar departed in the direction of the village of Saint-Colombin.

X.

GIVING THE SLIP.

About two hours after Aubin Courte-Joie's incarceration the sentry of the post heard a cart coming up the road which led past the guard-house. "Qui vive?" he cried; and when the cart was only a short distance from him he ordered it to halt. The cart, or rather the cartman, obeyed.

The corporal and four soldiers came out of the guard-room to inspect both man and vehicle. The cart was a harmless one, loaded with hay, and was like all the others that were plodding along the road to and from Nantes during the evening. Only one man was with it; he explained that he was going to Saint-Philbert with hay for his landlord,--adding that he went by night to economize time, which was precious at

this season of the year. The corporal gave orders to let him pass.

But this permission was wasted on the poor fellow. His cart, drawn by a single horse, had stopped at the steepest part of the rising ground about the guard-house, and in spite of the efforts made by horse and cartman it was impossible to start the heavy vehicle again.

"There isn't any sense," said the corporal, "in overburdening a beast like that! Don't you see that your horse has double the load he can draw?"

"What a pity," remarked one of the soldiers, "that the sergeant let that big ox of a fellow we had here go. We might have harnessed him to the horse and I'll warrant he'd have pulled to the collar."

"That's supposing he would have let himself be harnessed."

If the man who spoke last had looked behind the cart, he would have seen good reason why Trigaud should not allow himself to be harnessed to the front of the cart to pull it forward; he would also have understood the difficulty the horse found in starting the cart. For this difficulty was chiefly owing to Trigaud himself. The giant, completely hidden in the darkness and behind the hay, was dragging at the rear bar of the cart and opposing his strength to that of the horse, with as much success as he had won when exhibiting his prowess in the evening.

"Shall we lend you a hand?" said the corporal.

"Wait till I try again," said the driver, who had turned his cart obliquely, to lessen the sharpness of the acclivity, and now, grasping the horse by the bridle, prepared for a final effort to disprove the blame the corporal laid upon him.

He whipped his beast vigorously, exciting him by voice and pulling on the bridle, while the soldiers joined their cries to his. The horse stiffened all four legs for the effort, making the sparks fly from his heels among the stones of the road; then, he suddenly fell down, and at the same moment, as if the wheels had encountered some obstacle which disturbed their equilibrium, the cart swayed over to left and upset

against the building.

The soldiers ran forward and helped to release the horse from the harness and get him on his legs. The result of their friendly eagerness was that none of them saw Trigaud, who, satisfied no doubt with a result to which he had powerfully contributed by slipping under the cart and hoisting it on his Herculean shoulders, until it lost its centre of gravity, now retired composedly behind a hedge to await events.

"Shall we help you to set your cart back on its pin?" said the corporal to the driver. "If so, you must get an additional horse."

"Faith, no!" cried the cartman. "To-morrow I'll see about it. It is evident the good God doesn't mean me to keep on,--mustn't go against His will."

So saying, the peasant threw the reins on the crupper of his horse, pushed up the collar, mounted the animal, and departed, after wishing good-night to the soldiers, and saying he should be back in the morning to remove the hay. Two hundred yards from the guard-house Trigaud joined him.

"Well," said the peasant, "was that done to your liking? Are you satisfied?"

"Yes," replied Trigaud, "that was just as gars Aubin Courte-Joie ordered."

"Good luck to you, then! As for me, I'll put the horse back where I found it. But when the cartman wakes up to-morrow and looks for his cart and his hay he'll be rather surprised to find it up there."

"Well, tell him it is for the good of the cause, and he won't mind," replied Trigaud.

The two men parted.

Trigaud, however, did not leave the place; he roamed about its neighborhood till he heard the stroke of twelve from the steeple of Saint-Colombin. Then he returned to the guard-house, sabots in hand, and without making the slightest noise, or rousing the attention of the sentry, who was pacing up and down, he crept to the grating of

the dungeon. Once there he softly drew the hay into a thick heap beside the millstone, which he then, as softly, turned over upon it. Then he leaned behind it to the grating, wrenched off the boards that closed it, drew out first Courte-Joie, whom Michel pushed behind, then the young baron by the hands; after which, putting one on each shoulder, Trigaud, still barefooted, walked rapidly away from the neighborhood of the guard-house, making, in spite of his immense size and the weight he carried, no more noise than a cat on a carpet.

When he had gone about five hundred yards he stopped; not that he was tired but because Aubin Courte-Joie signed to him. Michel slipped to the ground and feeling in his pocket pulled out a handful of money, among it a few gold coins which he deposited in Trigaud's capacious hand.

The giant made as though he were about to put them in a pocket twice as capacious as the hand itself, but Aubin Courte-Joie stopped him.

"Return that to monsieur," he said; "we don't take pay from both sides."

"Both sides!" exclaimed Michel, "what do you mean?"

"Yes; we haven't obliged you personally as much as you think for," said Courte-Joie.

"I don't understand you, friend."

"My young gentleman," said the cripple, "now that we are safely outside that cellar I'll frankly admit that I lied to you just now, when I said I had got myself locked up merely to get you out of that hole. But, don't you see, I wanted your help; I could never have clambered up alone to that grating. Now, however, thanks to your good-will and my friend Trigaud's wrists, we've given 'em the slip successfully, and I feel bound to tell you that you have only exchanged one captivity for another."

"What does that mean?"

"It means that just now you were in a damp unhealthy prison, and now, though you are in the midst of the fields, on a calm, still night, you are none the less in prison."

"In prison?"

"Well, a prisoner."

"Whose prisoner?"

"Mine, of course!"

"Yours?" said Michel, laughing.

"Yes, for the time being. Oh, you needn't laugh! You are a prisoner, I tell you, till I consign you to the hands that want you."

"Whose hands are they?"

"As for that, you can find out for yourself. I fulfil my errand, neither more nor less. You needn't be frightened; you might have fallen into worse hands, that's all I shall tell you."

"But--"

"Well, in return for services that have been done, and in consideration of a good sum of money for my poor Trigaud, I took the order of a person who said: 'Help M. le Baron Michel de la Logerie to escape, and bring him to me.' I have helped you to escape, and now I am taking you to that person, Monsieur le baron."

"Listen," said the young man, who did not comprehend one word of all the tavern-keeper was telling him: "Here is my purse, well-filled; put me on the road to La Logerie, where I desire to be this evening, and take the purse and my thanks to boot."

Michel fancied that his two liberators did not think the price paid sufficient.

"Monsieur," said Courte-Joie, with all the dignity of which he was capable, "my comrade Trigaud cannot accept your reward because he has been already paid for doing exactly the contrary of what you wish. As for me, I am not aware if you know who I am, and therefore it is best to tell you. I am an honest trader, whom differences of opinion with the government have compelled to close his business;

but, miserable as my external appearance may be, let me tell you that I give my services to others, I don't sell them."

"But where the devil are you taking me?" demanded Michel, who certainly did not expect such sensitive feelings in his strange conductor.

"Be so good as to follow us, and in less than an hour you will find out."

"Follow you, indeed! when you say I am your prisoner! Not I! I am not so amiable as all that."

Courte-Joie made no answer; but a single touch on Trigaud's arm told the giant what he had to do, and the young man had scarcely uttered the words and made a hasty step in advance, before Trigaud, flinging out his arm like a grapnel-iron, seized him by the collar. Michel tried to shout, preferring to be retaken by the soldiers rather than be Trigaud's prisoner. But with his free hand the giant grasped the baron's face and silenced him as successfully as the famous gag of Monsieur de Vendôme might have done it. In this condition Michel was rushed, with the rapidity of a race-horse, across the fields for a distance of some seven or eight hundred yards, half suspended in space by the arm of the colossus, so that he touched the ground with the points of his toes only.

"That will do, Trigaud," said Courte-Joie, who was in his usual place on the shoulders of his human steed, who seemed to care little for the double burden; "that will do; the young baron is disgusted enough by this time with the idea of going back to La Logerie. Besides, we were cautioned to take care of him; it won't do to spoil the merchandise." Then as Trigaud halted obediently, Aubin said to Michel, who was nearly suffocated, "Will you be docile now?"

"You are the stronger, and I have no arms," said the baron. "I am therefore obliged to submit to your ill-treatment."

"Ill-treatment! Ha! don't you say that, or I'll appeal to your honor to say if it isn't true that you have urged me all along, both in the dungeon of the Blues and here in the

fields, to let you go back to La Logerie, and that it was only your obstinacy which obliged me to use violence."

"Well, at any rate, tell me the name of the person who ordered you to come after me and take me to him."

"I am positively forbidden to do so," said Courte-Joie, "but, without transgressing orders, I can tell you that it is one of your very best friends."

A cold chill ran through Michel's heart. He thought of Bertha. He fancied she had received his letter. It was doubtless an angry "she-wolf" who awaited him, and, painful as the interview would be, he felt that he could not, in honor, refuse it.

"Very good," he said; "I know now who it is."

"You know, do you?"

"Yes, it is Mademoiselle de Souday."

Aubin Courte-Joie did not answer; but he looked at Trigaud with an air that seemed to say, "Faith! he's guessed it!" Michel intercepted the look.

"Let us walk on," he said.

"You won't try to get away?"

"No."

"On your word of honor?"

"On my word of honor."

"Well, as you are now sensible, we'll give you the means of getting along without skinning your feet among the briers or gluing them to this cursed sticky soil, which adds at least seven pound weight to our boots."

These words were soon explained to Michel, for after crossing the highway behind Trigaud, and going a hundred yards into the woods that bordered the road he heard the whinnying of a horse.

"My horse!" he exclaimed, not concealing his surprise.

"Did you think we had stolen it?" asked Courte-Joie.

"Why didn't you stay at the place where I gave it to you?"

"Confound it!" replied Aubin. "I'll tell you: we noticed a lot of men walking round us and watching us with an interest that was too deep not to be disquieting; and as inquisitive folk are not to my taste, and time went by and you didn't return, we thought we had better take your beast to Banl[oe]uvre, where we supposed you had gone, if not arrested; and it was only as we went along we discovered that if not actually arrested you soon would be."

"Soon would be?"

"Yes, and so you were."

"Were you near me when the gendarmes arrested me?"

"My young gentleman," replied Courte-Joie in his jeering, sarcastic way, "you must have little experience in life or you wouldn't go along the high-roads dreaming of your own affairs, instead of looking about you and seeing who go and come and what they are doing. You might have heard the trot of those gendarmes ten minutes before they came up with you; we heard them, and you might easily have gone into the woods as we did."

Michel took care not to say what was filling his mind to the exclusion of every other thought at the moment the gendarmes arrested him; he contented himself by giving a deep sigh at this reminder of his sufferings. Then he mounted his horse, which Trigaud had unfastened and presented to him awkwardly enough, though Courte-Joie endeavored to show his henchman how to hold a stirrup properly. Then they took once more to the high-road, and the giant, with his hand on the withers of the horse, accompanied Michel easily at whatever pace the latter chose to ride.

A mile and a half farther on they struck into a crossroad, and Michel fancied, dark as

it was, that he recognized the path from certain shapes in the dark masses of the trees. Presently they reached a crossway at sight of which the young man quivered. He had passed that place on the evening when for the first time he walked home with Bertha from Tinguy's cottage. A minute more and they were making their way to the cottage itself, where, in spite of the lateness of the hour, a light was sparkling; at that instant a little cry, apparently a call, came from behind the hedge that ran along the road.

Aubin Courte-Joie answered it.

"Is that you, Monsieur Courte-Joie?" asked a woman's voice, and at the same moment a white form showed itself above the hedge.

"Yes, but who are you?"

"Rosine, Tinguy's daughter; don't you remember me?"

"Rosine!" exclaimed Michel, confirmed in the thought that Bertha was awaiting him by the sight of her young maid.

Courte-Joie with his monkey-like agility slid down Trigaud's body, and went to the hedge-bank with a movement a good deal like that of a frog's jump, leaving Trigaud to keep guard over Michel.

"Pest, little one!" he cried, "the night is so dark one may well take white for gray. But," he added, lowering his voice, "why are not you at home, where we were told to find you?"

"Because there are people in the cottage, and it won't do to take Monsieur Michel there."

"People? Ah, ça! those damned Blues get a footing everywhere."

"There are no soldiers there; it is only Jean Oullier, who has spent the day going round the country, and has brought a few of the Montaigu men with him."

"What are they doing?"

"Only talking. Go in, and drink a cup of cider with them, and warm yourself a bit."

"Well, but our young gentleman, my dear, what shall we do with him?"

"Leave him with me. That was agreed upon, you know, Maître Courte-Joie."

"We were to give him to you in your house, where there's a cellar or a garret to put him in; and that's easy enough to do, for he is not hard to manage, poor fellow,--but here in the open fields there's a risk of losing him; he'll slip away from you like an eel."

"Pooh!" said Rosine, with a smile which since the deaths of her father and brother seldom came upon her lips, "do you think he would make more objection to following a pretty girl than two old fellows like you?"

"But suppose the prisoner carries off his keeper?" said Courte-Joie, still dissatisfied.

"Oh! don't trouble yourself about that; I've a good foot, a good eye, and an honest heart. Besides, Baron Michel is my foster-brother; we've known each other this long while, and I know he is no more capable of forcing the virtue of a girl than the bolts of a prison. Besides, what were you told to do?"

"Release him if we could and bring him, willingly or unwillingly, to your father's house, where we were to find you."

"Well, here I am, and there's the house; the bird is out of his cage; that's all that was asked of you, wasn't it?"

"Hang it! yes, I believe so."

"Then, good-night."

"Look here, Rosine, for greater security, don't you want us to put a rope round his paws?" said Courte-Joie, sarcastically.

"Thank you, no, Maître Courte-Joie," said Rosine, going toward Michel; "better put one on your own tongue."

Michel, in spite of the distance at which he stood, had distinguished Rosine's name

and perceived, as we have said, the connivance which evidently existed between her and his captors. He was more and more confirmed in the belief that he owed his deliverance to Bertha. Courte-Joie's proceedings, the sort of violence he had used toward him, by means of his auxiliary Trigaud, the mystery in which the tavern-keeper had wrapped the origin and reason of his devotion to a man whom he scarcely knew,--all these things agreed wonderfully with the irritation which the letter he had sent by the notary was calculated to rouse in the violent and irascible heart of the young girl.

"Oh! Rosine, is that you?" he exclaimed, raising his voice as soon as he saw through the darkness his foster-sister coming toward him.

"Good!" cried Rosine, "you are not like that wretch of a Courte-Joie, who didn't choose to recognize me at first. You knew me at once, didn't you, Monsieur Michel?"

"Yes, of course. Tell me, Rosine, where is she?"

"Who?"

"Mademoiselle Bertha."

"Mademoiselle Bertha?"

"Yes."

"I don't know," said Rosine, with a simplicity which Michel knew to be sincere.

"What! you don't know?" he repeated.

"I suppose she is at Souday."

"You don't know, you only suppose?"

"Bless me--"

"Have you seen her to-day?"

"No, Monsieur Michel; I only know that she was to go to the château to-day with Monsieur le marquis; but I've been at Nantes myself."

"At Nantes!" cried the young man, "were you at Nantes this morning?"

"Yes."

"What time were you there?"

"It was striking nine as we crossed the pont Rousseau."

"You say we?"

"Yes, of course."

"Then you were not alone?"

"Why, no! I went there to accompany Mademoiselle Mary; it was sending to the château for me that delayed her journey."

"But where is she now,--Mademoiselle Mary?"

"Now, this minute?"

"Yes."

"On the little island of La Jonchère; and that's where I am going to take you. But how queer of you to ask me all this, Monsieur Michel!"

"Are you really going to take me to her?" cried Michel, beside himself with joy. "Then come along, come quick, my little Rosine."

"Good! and that old fool Courte-Joie, who said I couldn't manage you! What idiots men are!"

"Rosine, my dear, for heaven's sake don't lose time."

"I'm ready; but hadn't you better take me up behind? and then we can go faster."

"Of course we can," said Michel, whose heart, at the mere idea of seeing Mary, abjured all its jealous suspicions, and glowed with the thought that she whom he loved was really the one who had so effectually managed his release. "Come, come on!"

"Here I am! give me your hand," said Rosine, resting her wooden shoe on the young

man's foot. Then, making her spring, "There! I'm all right," she said, settling herself. "Now then, turn to the right."

The young man obeyed, with no more thought of Courte-Joie and Trigaud than if they did not exist. To him, there was no one at this moment in the world but Mary.

"Rosine," he said, after he had gone a little way, longing to talk about Mary, "how did mademoiselle know I was arrested by the gendarmes?"

"Bless me! I should have to tell you what happened before that, Monsieur Michel."

"Tell me all you can, my dear, good Rosine; only, do speak up. I'm burning with impatience. Ah! how good it is to be free," cried the young man; "and to be going to Mary!"

"Then I must tell you that mademoiselle came from Banl[oe]uvre to Souday very early this morning; she borrowed my Sunday clothes and put them on, and then she said 'Rosine, you are to go with me.'"

"Go on, Rosine, do! I'm listening."

"Well, then we started, with eggs in our baskets like real peasant-women. At Nantes while I sold eggs mademoiselle did her errand."

"What was that errand, Rosine?" asked Michel, before whose eyes the form of the young man disguised as a peasant now loomed like a spectre.

"Oh, that I don't know, Monsieur Michel." Then, without pausing to notice the heavy sigh with which Michel received her words, she added: "As mademoiselle was very tired we asked Monsieur Loriot, the Légé notary, to drive us back in his carriole. We stopped half way to bait the horse and while the notary was gossiping with the inn-keeper we went into the garden to get away from the people who stared at mademoiselle,--who is really much too beautiful for a peasant-woman. There she read a letter, which made her cry dreadfully."

"A letter!" exclaimed Michel.

"Yes, a letter Monsieur Loriot gave her as we came along."

"My letter!" murmured Michel; "she has read my letter to her sister! Oh!"

He stopped his horse abruptly, not knowing whether to rejoice or to be terrified at this fact.

"What's the matter?" asked Rosine, who of course, did not understand the sudden halt.

"Nothing, nothing," replied Michel, shaking the reins and putting the horse to a trot.

Rosine resumed her tale.

"Well, she was crying over the letter when some one called us from the other side of the hedge: it was Aubin Courte-Joie, and Trigaud with him. He told us your adventure, and asked mademoiselle what he had better do with your horse. Then, poor young lady, she seemed to feel worse than when she read that letter. She was all upset, and said such a lot of things to Courte-Joie--who, indeed, is under great obligations to Monsieur le marquis--that she persuaded him to rescue you from the soldiers. You've got a good friend in her, Monsieur Michel."

Michel listened delightedly; he was almost beside himself with joy and satisfaction, and would gladly have paid a piece of gold for every syllable Rosine uttered. He began to think his horse went much too slowly, and cutting a branch from a nut-tree he endeavored to excite the animal to a pace in keeping with the pulses of his heart.

"But," he asked, "why didn't she wait for me in your father's cottage, Rosine?"

"We did intend to, Monsieur le baron; in fact, we made Monsieur Loriot leave us there, telling him we would walk to Souday. Mademoiselle had charged Courte-Joie to take you to my house, and on no account let you go to Banl[oe]uvre until she had seen you; but as ill-luck would have it, the cottage, which since father's death has been quite deserted, was to-night as full of people as an inn. Jean Oullier has got a meeting there of all the leaders of his district. So Mademoiselle Mary hid herself in

the barn, and asked me to take her to some place where she could see you alone as soon as Courte-Joie brought you. Here we are on a level with the mill of Saint-Philbert; we shall see the lake of Grand-Lieu in a moment."

Rosine's last words brought a more emphatic blow with the nut-stick on the horse's quarters than any that preceded it. Michel felt that an end was coming to the difficult position in which he stood. Mary now knew the strength of his love; she knew that it was powerful enough to make him reject the proffered marriage; she was evidently not offended by it, since her regard for him had led her to do him a signal service and even to risk her reputation by doing it. Timid, reserved, and backward as Michel was, his hopes now rose to the level of these proofs, as he thought them, of Mary's affection. It seemed to him impossible that a young girl who braved public opinion, her father's anger, her sister's reproaches, to secure the safety of a man whose love and whose hopes she thoroughly well knew, could deny herself to that love or disappoint those hopes. He saw his future through a misty horizon still, but the mists were roseate as he began to descend the hill which locks in the lake of Grand-Lieu to the southeast.

"Are we getting there?" he said to Rosine.

"Yes," she replied, slipping from the horse's back, "follow me."

Michel dismounted and the pair entered a little thicket of osiers, in the middle of which stood a willow, to which Michel tied his horse. Then they pushed their way for a hundred yards or so through the flexible branches, until they came out upon the bank of a sort of creek which flowed to the lake, Rosine jumped into a little boat with a flat bottom. Michel offered to take the oars, but Rosine, knowing that he was a novice at such performances, pushed him back and took her seat on the thwart with an oar in each hand.

"No, no!" she said, "I can manage better than you; I have often rowed my poor father when he cast his nets into the lake."

"But," said Michel, "are you sure you can hit the island of Jonchère in this darkness?"

"Look!" she said, without turning round, "can't you see anything on the water?"

"Yes," replied the young man, "I see what looks like a star."

"Well, that star is Mademoiselle Mary, who is holding a lamp in her hand. She must have heard the oars, and is coming to meet us."

Michel would gladly have flung himself into the sea to precede the boat, for, in spite of Rosine's nautical skill, it progressed very slowly. He began to think he should never get over the distance between himself and that light, which was now seen to grow brighter and brighter every moment.

But, alas! contrary to the hopes which Rosine had inspired, when they were near enough to the island to distinguish the one willow which adorned it Michel did not see Mary awaiting him on the shore; the glow came from a fire of rushes which she had doubtless lighted and left to burn slowly out upon the shore.

"Rosine," cried Michel, aghast, jumping up in the boat which he nearly overset, "I don't see Mademoiselle Mary."

"She is probably in the duck-shooters' hut," replied the girl, pulling in her oars. "Take one of those burning sticks; you'll find the hut on the other side toward the offing."

Michel sprang ashore, did as he was told, and hurried away in the direction of the hut.

The island of Jonchère is some two or three hundred yards square. It is covered with reeds on the low ground, which is overflowed in winter by the waters of the lake. About fifty feet square of dry land rise above the level of this inundation; on this elevation old Tinguy had built for himself a little hut, to which he came on winter nights to watch for wild-duck. This was the place to which Rosine had taken Mary.

Whatever his hopes might be, Michel's heart beat almost to bursting when he came in sight of the little building. As he laid his hand on the latch of the door the oppression became so great that he hesitated.

During that momentary pause his eyes rested on a pane of glass introduced into the upper half of the entrance door, through which it was possible to look into the cabin. There he beheld Mary, sitting on a heap of reeds, her head bending forward on her breast.

By the feeble light of a lantern which was placed on a stool he fancied he saw two tears glittering on the long, fringed eyelashes of the young girl, and the thought that those tears were shed for him made him lose all diffidence. He opened the door and rushed to her feet, crying out:

"Mary, Mary, I love you!"

XI.

MARY IS VICTORIOUS AFTER THE MANNER OF PYRRHUS.

However firm Mary's resolution to control herself may have been, Michel's entrance was so sudden, his voice vibrated with such an accent, there was in his cry so much of love, so passionate a prayer, that the gentle creature was unable to repress her own emotion; her breast heaved, her fingers trembled, and the tears the young baron fancied he saw on her eyelids detached themselves and fell, drop by drop like liquid pearls, on Michel's hands which were grasping hers. The poor lover himself was too overcome with his own emotion to notice Mary's, and the girl had time to recover herself before he spoke. She gently pushed him aside and looked about her. Michel's eyes followed Mary's and then fixed themselves anxiously and inquiringly on her face.

"How is it that you are alone, monsieur?" she asked. "Where is Rosine?"

"And you, Mary," said the young man, in a voice full of sadness, "how is it that you

are not, as I am, full of the happiness of our meeting?"

"Ah! my friend," said Mary, dwelling on the word, "you have no cause--now especially--to doubt the interest I take in your safety."

"No," said Michel, trying to regain the hand she had drawn away from him. "No, indeed, for it is you to whom I owe my liberty, and probably my life."

"But," interrupted Mary, trying to smile, "all that does not make me forget that we are alone together. Do me the kindness to call Rosine, for there are certain social conventions I do not wish to disregard."

Michel sighed and remained on his knees, while two large tears escaped his eyelids. Mary turned away her head that she might not see them; then she made a motion as if to rise. But Michel retained her. The poor lad had not enough experience of the human heart to observe that Mary had never before manifested any reluctance to be alone with him, and to draw from her present action a deduction favorable to his love. On the contrary, all his beautiful visions went up in smoke, and Mary seemed to him even colder and more indifferent than she had been of late.

"Ah!" he cried, in a tone of melancholy reproach, "why did you rescue me from the hands of the soldiers? They might have shot me, but I would meet that fate rather than live to know you do not love me!"

"Michel! Michel!" cried Mary.

"Oh!" he exclaimed, "I repeat it, I would rather die."

"Don't talk so, naughty child that you are!" said Mary, striving to assume a maternal tone. "Don't you see that it distresses me?"

"You do not care!" said Michel.

"You cannot doubt," continued Mary, "that my friendship for you is true and most sincere."

"Alas! Mary," said the young man, sadly, "that feeling is not enough to satisfy the

passion that consumes my heart ever since I have known you; I do feel certain of your friendship, but my heart wants more."

Mary made a supreme effort.

"My friend, what you ask of me, Bertha will give you; She loves you as you wish to be loved, as you deserve to be loved;" said the poor child, in a trembling voice, striving to put her sister's name as a barrier between herself and the man she loved.

Michel shook his head and sighed.

"Oh, not her! not her!" he said.

"Why--" said Mary as if she did not see his gesture of refusal or hear that cry from his heart. "Why did you write her that letter, which would have filled her with despair had it reached her?"

"That letter; then it was you who received it?"

"Alas! yes," said Mary, "and painful as it was to me, it is most fortunate that I did so."

"Did you read it through?" asked Michel.

"Yes," said the young girl, lowering her eyes before the supplicating glance with which he enfolded her as he asked the question. "Yes, I read it--all; and it is because I did so, dear friend, that I wished to speak to you before you see my sister again."

"But, Mary, do you not see that that letter is truth itself from the first line to the last, and that if I love Bertha at all it can only be as a sister?"

"No, no," cried Mary; "I only know that my future would be horrible if I caused unhappiness to my poor sister whom I love so well."

"But," said Michel, "what do you ask of me?"

"I ask you," replied Mary, clasping her hands, "to sacrifice a feeling which has not had time to strike deep roots into your heart; I ask you to forget a fancy nothing justifies, to renounce an attachment which can have no good result for you and must

be fatal to all three of us."

"Ask my life, Mary; I can kill myself, or let myself be killed,--nothing is easier; but to ask me not to love you! Good God! what would my poor heart be if deprived of its love for you?"

"And yet it must be so, dear Michel," said Mary, in her winning voice; "for never--no never--will you obtain from me a word of encouragement for the love you speak of in that letter. I have sworn it."

"To whom, Mary?"

"To God and to myself."

"Oh!" exclaimed Michel, sobbing, "and I dreamed she loved me!"

Mary thought that the more warmth he put into his words and actions, the colder it behooved her to be.

"All that I have now said to you, my friend," she continued, "is dictated not only by common-sense, but by the strong interest I feel in your future. If I were indifferent to you, I should simply express my feelings and let the matter end; but as a friend I cannot do so,--as a friend, I say to you, Michel, forget the woman who can never be yours and love the woman who loves you and to whom you are virtually betrothed."

"Oh, but you know very well how that betrothal, as you call it, took me by surprise; you know that in making that proposal Petit-Pierre mistook my feelings. Those feelings you well know. I expressed them to you that night when the general and the soldiers were at the château. You did not repulse them; I felt your hands press mine; I knelt at your feet, Mary, as I do now; you bent your head to mine; your hair, your beautiful, adored hair touched my forehead. I did wrong not to tell Petit-Pierre who it was I loved; but how could I expect what has happened? It never crossed my mind she could suppose I loved any one but Mary. It is the fault of my timidity, which I curse; but, after all, it is not so grievous a fault that it ought to separate me forever from the woman I love, and chain my life to one I do not love."

"Alas! my friend, the fault that seems to you so light seems to me irreparable. Whatever happens, and even though you repudiate the promise made in your name and in which you acquiesced by silence, you must understand that I can never be yours, for I will never rend the heart of my beloved sister with the sight of my happiness."

"Good God!" cried Michel, "how wretched I am!"

He put his face in his hands and burst into tears.

"Yes," said Mary, "I know you suffer now; but take courage. Call up your virtue, your courage, my friend. Listen willingly to my advice; this feeling will, little by little, be effaced from your heart. If necessary, I will go away for a time that you may cure yourself."

"Go away! separate yourself from me! No, Mary, never, never! no, don't leave me, for I swear that the day you leave, I leave; where you go, I go. Good God! what would become of me, deprived of your dear presence? No, no, no; don't go, I implore you, Mary."

"So be it; I will stay, but only to help you to do whatever may be painful and sad in your duty; and when that is done, when you are happy, when you are Bertha's husband--"

"Never! never!" muttered Michel.

"Yes, my friend, for Bertha is more fitted to be your wife than I am; her love for you,--and I can swear this for I have heard her express it,--is greater than you suppose; her tenderness will satisfy the craving for love which now consumes you, and my sister's strength and energy, which I do not possess, will clear your path in life of the thorns and briers you might not of yourself be able to put aside. So, if there is really a sacrifice on your part, that sacrifice, believe me, will be well-rewarded."

In saying these words Mary affected a calmness which was far indeed from being in

her heart, the real condition of which was betrayed by her paleness and agitation. As for Michel, he listened in feverish agitation.

"Don't talk so!" he cried as she ended. "Do you suppose the current of human affections is a thing to be managed and directed as we please, like a river which an engineer forces between the banks of a canal, or a vine which the gardener trains as he will? No, no; I tell you again, I repeat it and I will repeat it a hundred times,--it is you, you alone whom I love, Mary. It would be impossible for my heart to name any other name than yours, even if I wished it, and I don't wish it. My God! my God!" continued the young man, flinging up his arms to heaven with a look of agonized despair; "what would become of me if I saw you the wife of another man?"

"Michel," said Mary, with passionate fervor, "if you will do as I ask you, I swear by all that is most sacred that, as I cannot be your wife, I will belong to none but God; I will never marry. All my affection, my tenderness shall remain yours; and this affection will not be of the vulgar kind that years destroy or a mere chance kills. It will be the deep, unutterable affection of a sister for a brother; it will be a gratitude which will forever bind me to you. I shall owe to you the happiness of my sister, and all my life shall be spent in blessing you."

"Your love for your sister misleads you, Mary," replied Michel. "You think only of her; you do not think of me when you seek to condemn me to the horrible torture of being chained, for life, to a woman I do not love. Oh, Mary! it is cruel of you,--you for whom I would give my life,--it is cruel to ask of me a thing to which I can never resign myself."

"Oh, yes, you can, my friend," persisted the girl; "you can surely resign yourself to what, though it may be the result of fate, is also most assuredly, a generous and magnanimous action; you can resign yourself because you know that God would never suffer a sacrifice like that to go unrewarded, and the reward will be--yes, it will be--the happiness of two poor orphans."

"Oh, Mary," said Michel, quite beside himself, "don't talk to me like that. Oh, it is plain that you don't know what it is to love! You tell me to give you up! but remember that you are my heart, my soul, my life,--it is simply asking me to tear my heart from my breast, forswear my soul, blast my happiness, dry up my very existence at its source. You are the light for which and by which the world, to my eyes, is a world; the day you cease to shine upon my life I shall fall into a gulf the darkness of which horrifies me. I swear to you, Mary, that since I have known you, since that moment when I first saw you and felt your hands cooling my wounded forehead, you have been so identified with my being that there is not a thought in my mind that does not belong to you, all that is within me refers to you, and if my heart were to lose you, it would cease to beat as if the principle of life were taken from it. You see, therefore, that it is impossible I should do as you ask."

"And yet," cried Mary, in a paroxysm of despair, "Bertha loves you, and I do not love you."

"Ah! if you do not love me, Mary, if, with your eyes in my eyes, your hands in my hands, you have the courage to say, 'I do not love you,' then, indeed, all is over."

"What do you mean by that,--how is it all over?"

"Simply enough, Mary. As truly as those stars in heaven see the chastity of my love for you, as truly as that God who is above those stars knows that my love for you is immortal, Mary, neither you nor your sister shall ever see me again."

"Oh, don't say that, Michel."

"I have but to cross the lake and mount my horse, which is there among the osiers, and gallop to the first guard-house; once there, I have only to say, 'I am Baron Michel de la Logerie,' to be shot in three days." Mary gave a cry. "And that is what I will do," added Michel, "as surely as the stars look down upon us, and God himself is above them."

The young man made a movement to rush from the hut. Mary threw herself before

him and clasped him round the body, but her strength gave way, her hold loosened, and she slipped to his feet.

"Michel," she murmured, "if you love me as you say you do, you will not refuse my entreaty. In the name of your love I implore you,--I whom you say you love,--do not kill my sister, grant me her life; grant her happiness to my prayers and tears. God will bless you for it; and every day my soul shall rise to Him, imploring happiness for one who has helped me to save a sister I love better than myself. Michel, forget me,--I ask it of your mercy, Michel,--do not reduce my Bertha to despair."

"Oh, Mary, Mary, you are cruel!" cried the young man, grasping his hair with both hands; "you are asking my very life. I shall die of this."

"Courage, friend, courage," said the girl, weakening herself.

"I could have courage for all, except renouncing you; but the simple thought of that makes me feebler than a child,--more despairing than a soul in hell."

"Michel, my friend, will you do as I ask of you?" stammered Mary, her voice half drowned in tears.

"I--I--"

He was about to answer that he would, but he stopped.

"Ah," he cried, "if you suffered as I suffer!"

At that cry of utter selfishness and yet of infinite love, Mary, beside herself, panting for breath, half maddened, clasped him in her nervous arms and said in a sobbing voice:--

"Would it comfort you to know that my heart is torn with an anguish like yours?"

"Yes, yes; oh, yes!"

"Would hell be a paradise if I were by your side?"

"An eternity of suffering with you, Mary, and I could bear all."

"Well, then," cried Mary, losing control of herself; "be satisfied, cruel man! your

sufferings, your anguish--I feel them all. Like you, I am dying of despair at the sacrifice our duty is wringing from us."

"Then you love me, Mary?" said the young man.

"Oh, faithless heart!" she cried; "oh, faithless man, who can see my tears, my tortures, and cannot see my love!"

"Mary, Mary!" exclaimed Michel, staggering, breathless, mad, and drunken at once; "after killing me with grief, will you kill me with joy?"

"Yes, yes, I love you!" repeated Mary. "I love you! I needs must say the words that have choked me long. Yes, I love you as you love me. I love you so well that when I think of the sacrifice we both must make, death would be dear to me could it come at this moment when I tell you the truth."

Saying these words in spite of herself, and as if attracted by magnetic power, Mary approached her face to that of the young man, who looked at her with the eyes of one whom a sudden hallucination has flung into ecstasy; her blond hair touched his forehead; their breaths mingled and intoxicated both. As if overcome by this amorous effluence, Michel closed his eyes, his lips touched Mary's, and she, exhausted by her struggle so long sustained against herself, yielded to the impulse that moved her. Their lips united, and thus they stayed for several moments, lost in a gulf of dolorous felicity.

Mary was the first to recover herself. She rose quickly, pushed Michel away from her, and began to cry bitterly.

At that instant Rosine entered the hut.

XII.

BARON MICHEL FINDS AN OAK INSTEAD OF A REED ON WHICH TO LEAN.

Mary felt that Rosine's coming was a help sent to her from above. Alone, without

other support than her own heart, which had yielded so utterly, she felt herself at the mercy of her lover. Seeing Rosine, she ran to her and caught her hand.

"What is it, my child?" she said. "What have you come to say?"

She passed her hands over her forehead and eyes to efface, if possible, the signs of her emotion.

"Mademoiselle," said Rosine, "I think I hear a boat."

"In which direction?"

"Toward Saint-Philbert."

"I thought your father's boat was the only one on the lake."

"No, mademoiselle, the miller of Grand-Lieu has one; it is half-rotten to be sure, but some one has no doubt taken it to come over here."

"Well," said Mary, "I'll go with you and see who it is?"

Then, without paying the slightest heed to the young man, who stretched out his arms to her in a supplicating way, Mary, who was not sorry to leave Michel in order to gather up her courage, sprang from the hut. Rosine followed her.

Michel was left alone, completely crushed; he felt that happiness had escaped him, and he doubted the possibility of recovering it. Never again would another such scene bring another such avowal.

When Mary returned, after listening in all directions without hearing anything more than the lapping of the water on the shore, she found Michel sitting on the reeds with his head in his hands. She thought him calm,--he was only depressed; she went to him. Michel, hearing her step, raised his head, and seeing her as reserved on her return as she was emotional before she left him, he merely held out his hand and shook his head sadly.

"Oh, Mary, Mary!" he said.

"Well, my friend?" she replied.

"Repeat to me, for Heaven's sake--repeat to me those dear words you said just now! Tell me again that you love me!"

"I will repeat it, dear friend," said Mary, sadly; "and as often as you wish it, if the conviction that my love is watching tenderly your sufferings and your efforts can in any way inspire you with courage and resolution."

"What!" cried Michel, wringing his hands, "are you still thinking of that cruel separation? Can you expect me, with the knowledge of my love for you, and the certainty of your love for me,--can you still expect me to give myself to another woman?"

"I expect us both to accomplish the duty that lies before us, my friend. That is why I do not regret having opened my heart to you. I hope that my example will teach you to suffer, and inspire you with resignation to the will of God. A fatal chain of circumstances, which I deplore as much as you, Michel, has separated us; we cannot belong to each other."

"But why not? I have made no pledge. I never said one word of love to Mademoiselle Bertha."

"No; but she told me that she loved you. I received her confidence as long ago as that evening when you met her at Tinguy's cottage, and walked home with her."

"But whatever I said to her that night that may have seemed tender referred to you," said the luckless young man.

"Ah! friend, a heart which bends is soon filled; poor Bertha deceived herself. As we returned to the château that night and I was thinking in the depths of my heart, 'I love him,' she said those very words to me aloud. To love you is only to suffer, but to be yours, Michel, would be a crime."

"Ah! my God! my God!"

"Yes. God will give us strength, Michel,--the God whom we invoke. Let us bear

heroically the consequences of our mutual timidity. I do not blame you for yours, be sure of that; but, at least, spare me the remorse of feeling that I have made my sister's unhappiness without benefit or advantage to myself."

"But," said Michel, "your project is senseless; the very thing you seek to avoid would surely come of it. Sooner or later Bertha must discover that I do not love her, and then--"

"Listen to me, friend." interrupted Mary, laying her hand on Michel's arm: "though very young, I have strong convictions on what is called love. My education, the direct opposite of yours, has, like yours, its drawbacks, but also some advantages. One of these advantages--a terrible one, I admit--is a practical view of realities. Accustomed to hear conversations in which the past disguised nothing of its weakness, I know, through what I have learned from my father's life, that nothing is more fugitive than the feelings which you now express to me. I therefore hope that Bertha will have taken my place in your heart before she has time to perceive your indifference. That is my hope, Michel, and I pray you not to destroy it."

"You ask an impossibility, Mary."

"Well, if it must be so, it must. You are free not to keep the engagement which binds you to my sister: free to reject the prayer I make to you on my knees; it will be only another wound and shame inflicted on two poor girls already unjustly treated by the world. My poor Bertha will suffer, I know that; but at least I shall suffer with her, and with the same pain as hers; but take care, Michel, lest our sufferings, increased by each seeing that of the other, end by cursing you.

"I implore you, Mary. I conjure you do not say such words,--they break my heart."

"Listen, Michel; the hours are passing, the night is nearly gone, day will soon be here; we must now separate, and my resolution is irrevocable. We have both dreamed a dream which we must both forget. I have told you how you can deserve,--I will not say my love, for you have it,--but the eternal gratitude of your

poor Mary. I swear to you," she added, in a deeper tone of supplication than she had yet used; "I swear to you that if you will devote yourself to the happiness of my sister, I will have but one thought, one prayer, in my heart,--that of beseeching God to reward you here below, and in heaven above. If on contrary, you refuse me, Michel, if your heart cannot rise to the level of my own abnegation, you must renounce the sight of us, you must go far away; for, I repeat, and I swear it before God, I will never, my friend, never be yours!"

"Mary, Mary, do not take that oath; leave me some hope, at least. The obstacles around us may lessen."

"To leave you any hope would be doing wrong, Michel; and since the certainty that I share your sufferings has not given you--as you promised me it should--the firmness and resignation which strengthen my own heart, I bitterly regret the confession I have made this night. No," she added, passing her hand across her forehead, "we must have no more dreams; they are too dangerous. I have made you a request, a prayer; you will not listen to it; there is nothing left but to bid you an eternal farewell."

"Never to see you, Mary! Oh, rather death! I will do what you exact--"

He stopped, unable to say the words.

"I exact nothing," said Mary. "I have asked you on my knees not to break two hearts instead of one, and, on my knees, I once more ask it."

And she did, in fact, slip down to the feet of the young man.

"Rise, rise!" he cried. "Yes, Mary, yes, I will do what you want. But you must be there, you must never leave me; and when I suffer too much I must draw my strength and courage from your eyes. Promise me that, Mary, and I will obey you."

"Thank you, friend, thank you. That which gives me strength to ask and accept this sacrifice, is my conviction that nothing is lost for your happiness as well as Bertha's."

"But yours, yours?" cried the young man.

"Do not think of me, Michel." A groan escaped him. "God," she continued, "has given consolations to sacrifice of which the soul knows nothing till it sounds those depths. As for me," said Mary, veiling her eyes with her hand as though she feared they might deny her words, "I shall endeavor to find the sight of your happiness sufficient for me."

"Oh, my God, my God!" cried Michel, wringing his hands; "is it all over,--am I condemned to death?"

And he flung himself face down upon the floor.

At that moment Rosine entered.

"Mademoiselle," she said, "the day is breaking."

"What is the matter, Rosine?" asked Mary; "you are trembling!"

"I am sure I heard oars in the lake; and just now I heard footsteps behind me."

"Footsteps on this lonely islet! you are dreaming, child."

"I think so myself, for I have searched everywhere and seen no one."

"Now we must go," said Mary.

A sob from Michel made her turn to him.

"We must go alone, my friend," she said, "but in an hour Rosine shall come back for you with the boat. Don't forget what you have promised me. I rely upon your courage."

"Rely upon my love, Mary," he said. "The proof you exact is terrible; the task you impose immense. God grant I may not fail under the burden of it."

"Remember, Michel, that Bertha loves you, that she cherishes every glance you give her. Remember, too, that I would rather die than have her discover the true state of your heart."

"Oh, my God! my God!" murmured the young man.

"Courage! courage! Farewell, friend!"

Profiting by the moment when Rosine turned to open the door and look outside, Mary laid a kiss on Michel's forehead. It was a different kiss from that she had given him half an hour earlier. The first was the jet of flame, which darts from the heart of the lover to that of the loved one; the second was the chaste farewell of a sister to a brother.

Michel understood the difference, and it wrung his heart. Tears sprang again to his eyes. He went with the two young girls to the shore, and when he had seen them in the boat he sat down upon a stone and watched the little bark till it was lost in the morning mist that was rising from the lake.

The sound of oars still lingered in his ear; he was listening, as though to some funeral knell which told him that his illusions were vanishing like phantom dreams, when a hand was lightly laid upon his shoulder. He turned and saw Jean Oullier close beside him.

The Vendéan's face was sadder than usual, but it seemed to have lost the expression of hatred which Michel had so often seen there. His eyelids were moist, and two big drops were hanging to the beard which formed a collar round his face. Were they dew? Could they be tears from the eyes of the old follower of Charette?

He held out his hand to Michel, a thing he had never done before. The latter looked at him in surprise, and took, with some hesitation, the hand that was offered to him.

"I heard all," said Jean Oullier.

Michel sighed and dropped his head.

"Noble hearts! both of you," said the Vendéan; "but you were right. It is a terrible task that poor child has set you. May God reward her devotion! As for you, when you feel that you are weakening, let me know, Monsieur de la Logerie, and you'll

find out one thing, and that is, if Jean Oullier hates his enemies he can also love those he does love."

"Thank you," replied Michel.

"Come, come!" continued Jean Oullier, "no more tears; it isn't manly to cry. If necessary, I'll try to make that iron head, called Bertha, listen to reason; though I admit to you, in advance, it isn't easy."

"But in case she won't hear reason, there is one thing else you can help me in,--an easy thing."

"What is that?"

"To get myself killed."

Michel said it so simply that it was evidently the expression of his thought.

"Oh, oh!" muttered Jean Oullier; "he really looks, my faith, as if he'd do it." Then he added aloud, addressing the young man: "Well, so be it; if the necessity comes, we'll see about it."

This promise, melancholy as it was, gave Michel a little courage.

"Now, then," said the old Chouan, "come with me. You can't stay here. I have a miserable boat, but by taking some precautions I think we can both of us get safely ashore."

"But Rosine was to return in an hour and row me over," objected the young man.

"She will come on a useless errand, that's all;" replied Jean Oullier. "It will teach her to gossip on the high-road about other people's affairs as she did with you to-night."

After these words, which explained how Jean Oullier came to visit the island of Jonchère, Michel followed him to the boat, and presently, avoiding the road taken by Mary and Rosine, they took to the open country in the direction of Saint-Philbert.

XIII.

THE LAST KNIGHTS OF ROYALTY.

As Gaspard had clearly foreseen, and as he had predicted to Petit-Pierre at the farmhouse of Banl[oe]uvre, the postponement of the uprising till the 4th of June was a fatal blow to the projected insurrection. In spite of every effort and every activity on the part of the leaders of the Legitimist party, who all, like the Marquis de Souday, his daughters, and adherents, went themselves to the villages of their divisions to carry the order for delay, it was too late to get the information sent to the country districts, and these conflicting plans defeated the whole movement.

In the region about Niort, Fontenay, and Luçon, the royalists assembled; Diot and Robert, at the head of their organized bands, issued from the forests of the Deux-Sèvres, to serve as kernel to the movement. This was instantly made known to the military leaders of the various surrounding detachments, who at once assembled their forces, marched to the parish of Amailloux, defeated the peasantry, and arrested a large number of gentlemen and royalist officers who were in the neighborhood, and had rushed into the fight on hearing the firing.

Arrests of the same kind were made in the environs of the Champ-Saint-Père. The post of Port-la-Claye was attacked, and although, because of the small number of assailants the royalists were easily repulsed, it was evident from the audacity and vigor of the attack that it was made, or at any rate led, by other than mere refractories,--deserting recruits.

On one of the prisoners taken at the Champ-Saint-Père a list was found of the young men forming the corps d'élite of the royalist forces. This list, these attacks made on various sides at the same time, these arrests of men known for the enthusiasm of their Legitimist opinions, naturally put the authorities on their guard, and made them regard as imminent the dangers they had hitherto treated lightly.

If the countermand of the uprising did not reach the country districts of La Vendée in time, still less could the provinces of Brittany and Maine receive the order; and

there the standard of revolt was openly unfurled. In the first, the division of Vitré took the field, and even won a victory for the Bretons at Bréal,--an ephemeral victory, which was changed to defeat the following day at Gaudinière.

In Maine Gaullier received the countermand too late to stop his gars from making a bloody fight at Chaney, which lasted six hours; and besides that engagement (a serious one in its results) the peasantry, unwilling to return to their homes after beginning the insurrection, kept up a daily guerilla warfare with the various columns of troops which lined the country.

We may boldly declare that the countermand of May 22, the headlong and unsupported movements which then took place, the want of cohesion and confidence which naturally resulted, did more for the government of July than the zeal of all its agents put together.

In the provinces where these premature attempts were made it was impossible to revive the ardor thus chilled and wasted. The insurgent peasantry had time to reflect; and reflection, often favorable to calculation, is always fatal to sentiment. The leaders, whose names were now made known to the government, were easily surprised and arrested on returning to their homes.

It was still worse in the districts where the peasantry had openly taken the field. Finding themselves abandoned by their own supporters, and not receiving the reinforcements on which they counted, they believed themselves betrayed, broke their guns in two, and returned, indignantly, to their cottages.

The Legitimist insurrection died in the womb. The cause of Henri V. lost two provinces before his flag was raised; but such was the courage of these sons of giants that, as we are now about to see, they did not yet despair.

Eight days had elapsed since the events recorded in our last chapter, and during those eight days the political turmoil going on around Machecoul was so violent that it swept into its orbit all the personages of our history whose own passions and

interests might otherwise have kept them aloof from it.

Bertha, made uneasy at first by Michel's disappearance, was quite reassured when he returned; and her happiness was shown with such effusion and publicity that it was impossible for the young man, unless he broke the promise he had made to Mary, to do otherwise than appear, on his side, glad to see her. The many services she had to render to Petit-Pierre, the many details of the correspondence with which she was intrusted, so absorbed Bertha's time that she did not notice Michel's sadness and depression, or the constraint with which he yielded to the familiarity her masculine habits led her to show to the man whom she regarded as her betrothed husband.

Mary, who had rejoined her father and sister two hours after leaving Michel on the islet of Jonchère, avoided carefully all occasions of being alone with her lover. When the necessities of their daily life brought them together she took every possible means to put her sister at an advantage in Michel's eyes; and when her own eyes encountered those of the young baron she looked at him with so supplicating an expression that he felt himself gently but relentlessly held to the promise he had given.

If, by accident, Michel seemed to authorize by his silence the attentions with which Bertha overwhelmed him, Mary affected a joyous and demonstrative pleasure, which, though doubtless far from her own heart, was agonizing to that of Michel. Nevertheless, in spite of all her efforts, it was impossible for her to conceal the ravages which the struggle she was making against her love wrought in her appearance. The change would certainly have struck every one about her had they been less preoccupied,--Bertha with her love, Petit-Pierre and the marquis with the cares of State. Poor Mary's healthy freshness disappeared; dark circles of bluish bistre hollowed her eyes, her pale cheeks visibly grew thinner, and slender lines appearing on her beautiful forehead contradicted the smile that was ever on her lips.

Jean Oullier, whose loving solicitude could not have been deceived, was absent. The

very day he returned to Banl[oe]uvre the marquis despatched him on a mission to the East, and, inexperienced as he was in matters of the heart, he had departed almost easy in mind, having no real conception, in spite of all he had heard, that the trouble was so deep.

The 3d of June had now arrived. On that day a great commotion took place at the Jacquet mill in the district of Saint-Colombin. From early morning the going and coming of women and beggars had been incessant, and by nightfall the orchard which surrounded the mill had all the appearance of an encampment.

Every few minutes men in blouses or hunting-jackets, armed with guns, sabres, and pistols, kept coming in; some through the fields, others by the roads. They said a word to the sentries posted around the farm, on which word they were allowed to pass. They stacked their guns along the hedge which separated the orchard from the courtyard, and prepared, as they severally arrived, to bivouac, under the apple-trees. Each and all came full of devotion; few with hope.

The courage and loyalty of such convictions make them sacred and worthy of respect. No matter to what opinions we may belong, we must be proud of finding such loyalty, such courage, among friends, and glad to recognize them among adversaries. That political faith for which men did not shrink from dying may be rebuked and denied; God was not with it and it fell. Nevertheless, it has won the right to be honored, even in defeat, without discussion.

Antiquity declared, "Ills to the vanquished!" but antiquity was pagan. Mercy never reigned among false gods.

As for us,--not concerning ourselves in the sentiments or convictions which animated them,--we feel it was a noble and chivalric devotion which these Vendéans of 1832 held up to France, then beginning to be invaded by the narrow, sordid, commercial spirit which has since then absorbed it. And above all it seems noble and chivalrous when we reflect that most of these Vendéans had no illusion as to the

outcome of their struggle; they advanced without hope to certain death. However mistaken they may have been, whatever may be said of their action, the names of those men belong to history; and we here join hands with history, if not to glorify them, at least to absolve them, although their actual names must not be mentioned in our narrative.

Inside the Jacquet mill the concourse, though less numerous than without, was not less noisily busy. Some of the leaders were receiving their last instructions and concerting with each other for the morrow; others were relating the occurrences of the day, which had not been uneventful. A gathering had taken place on the moors of Les Vergeries, and several encounters with the government troops had occurred.

The Marquis de Souday made himself conspicuous among the various groups by his enthusiastic loquacity. Once more he was a youth of twenty. In his feverish impatience it seemed to him that the sun of the morrow would never dawn; and he was profiting by the time the earth consumed in making its revolution to give a lesson in military tactics to the young men about him.

Michel, sitting in the chimney-corner, was the only person present whose mind was not completely absorbed in the events that were impending. His situation was growing more complicated every moment. A few friends and neighbors of the marquis had congratulated him on his approaching marriage with Mademoiselle de Souday. At every step he made he felt he was entangling himself more and more in the net he had blindly entered head foremost; and at the same time he felt that all his efforts to keep the promise Mary had wrung from him were hopeless. He knew it was in vain to attempt to drive from his heart the gentle image that had taken possession of it.

His sadness grew deeper and heavier, and presented at this moment a curious contrast with the eager countenances of those about him. The noise and the excitement soon became intolerable to him, and he rose and went out without

exciting notice. He crossed the courtyard and passing behind the mill-wheel entered the miller's garden, followed the water-course, and finally sat down on the rail of a little bridge some two or three hundred yards from the house.

He had been sitting there about an hour, indulging in all the dismal ideas which the consciousness of his unfortunate position suggested to him, when he noticed a man who was coming toward him along the path he himself had just taken.

"Is that you, Monsieur Michel?" asked the man.

"Jean Oullier!" cried Michel. "Jean Oullier! Heaven has sent you. When did you get back?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Have you seen Mary?"

"Yes, I have seen Mademoiselle Mary."

And the old keeper raised his eyes to heaven and sighed. The tone in which he said the words, the gesture, and the sigh which accompanied them, showed that his deep solicitude was not blind to the cause of the young girl's fading appearance, and also that he fully appreciated the gravity of the situation.

Michel understood him; he covered his face with his hands and merely murmured:--

"Poor Mary!"

Jean Oullier looked at him with a certain compassion; then, after a moment's silence he said:--

"Have you decided on a course?"

"No; but I hope that to-morrow a musket-ball will save me the necessity."

"Oh," said Jean Oullier, "you can't count on that; balls are so capricious,--they never go to those who call them."

"Ah, Monsieur Jean!" exclaimed Michel, shaking; "we are very unhappy."

"Yes, so it seems; you are making terrible trouble for yourselves, all of you. What you call love is nothing but unreasonableness. Good God! who could have told me that these two children, who thought of nothing but roaming the woods bravely and merrily with their father and me, would fall in love with the first hat that came in their way,--and that, too, when the man it covered was more of a girl in his sex than they were in theirs!"

"Alas! it is fatality, my good Jean."

"No," said the Vendéan, "you needn't blame fate; it was I. But come, as you haven't the nerve to face that foolish Bertha, and speak the truth, how do you expect to remain an honest man?"

"I shall do all I can to get nearer to Mary; you can count on me for that so long as you act in that direction."

"Who says anything about your keeping near to Mary? Poor child! she has more good sense than all of you. She cannot be your wife,--she told you so the other day, or rather the other night; and she was perfectly right,--only, her love for Bertha is carrying her too far. She is condemning herself to the torture she wishes to spare her sister; and that is what neither you nor I must allow."

"How can we help it, Jean Oullier?"

"Easily. As you cannot be the husband of the woman you love, you must not be the husband of the woman you don't love. Now it is my opinion that Mary's grief will get easier when that pain is taken away from her. For she may say what she pleases; there's always a touch of jealousy at the bottom of a woman's heart, however tender it may be."

"Renounce both the hope of making Mary my wife and the consolation of seeing her? Impossible! I can't do it. I tell you, Jean Oullier, that to get nearer to Mary I would go through hell-fire."

"Phrases, my young gentleman, phrases! The world has been consoled for being

turned out of paradise, and at your age a man can always forget the woman he loves. Besides, the thing that ought to separate you from Mary is something else than hell-fire. It may be the dead body of her sister; for you don't yet know what an undisciplined child it is that goes by the name of Bertha, nor of what she is capable, I don't understand, poor fool of a peasant that I am, all your fine sentiments; but it seems to me the grandest of them ought to pause before an obstacle of this sort."

"But what can I do, my friend? What shall I do? Advise me."

"All the trouble comes, as I think, from your not having the character of your sex. You must now do what a person of the sex to which by your manners and your weakness you seem to belong would do under the circumstances. You have not known how to master the situation in which fate placed you; and now you must flee from it."

"Flee from it! But did you hear Mary say the other day that if I renounced her sister she would never see me again?"

"What of that, if she respects you?"

"But think of all I shall have to suffer!"

"You won't suffer at a distance more than you will suffer here."

"Here, at least, I can see her."

"Do you think the heart knows distance? No, not even when those we are parted from have bid us their last farewell. Thirty years ago and over I lost my poor wife, but there are days when I see her as plain as I now see you. Mary's image will remain on your heart, and you will hear her voice thanking you for what you now do."

"Ah! I would rather you talked to me of death."

"Come, Monsieur Michel, make an effort. I'd go on my knees to you if necessary--I who have many a cause of hatred against you; I beg you, I implore you, give peace,

as far as it is now possible, to those poor creatures!"

"What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to go. I have said it, and I repeat it."

"Go? Go away? You can't mean it. Why, they fight to-morrow, and to go to-day would be deserting,--it would be dishonor."

"No, I don't want you to dishonor yourself. If you go it shall not be desertion."

"How so?"

"In the absence of a captain of the Clisson division I have been appointed to take his command; you shall come with me."

"Oh, I hope the first ball to-morrow may carry me off."

"You will fight under my eyes," continued Jean Oullier; "and if any one doubts your bravery, I'll bear witness to it. Will you come?"

"Yes," replied Michel, in so low a voice that the old man could scarcely hear him.

"Good! in three hours we start."

"Start! without bidding her farewell?"

"Yes. In the face of such circumstances she might not have the strength to let you go. Come, take courage!"

"I will take it, Oullier; you shall be satisfied with me."

"Then I can rely upon you?"

"You can. I give you my word of honor."

"I shall be waiting at the cross ways of Belle-Passe in three hours from now."

"I will be there."

Jean Oullier made Michel a farewell sign that was almost friendly; then springing across the little bridge, he went to the orchard and mingled with the other Vendéans.

XIV.

JEAN OULLIER LIES FOR THE GOOD OF THE CAUSE.

The young baron remained for several minutes in a state of utter prostration. Jean Oullier's words rang in his ears like a knell sounding his own death. He thought he dreamed, and he kept repeating, as if to convince himself of the reality of his sorrow, "Go away? Go away?"

Presently, the chill idea of death, which he had lately invoked as a succor from heaven, an idea adopted as we fasten upon such thoughts at twenty, passed from his brain to his heart and froze him. He shuddered from head to foot. He saw himself separated from Mary, not merely by a distance he dared not cross, but by that wall of granite which incloses a man eternally in his last abode.

His pain grew so intense that he thought it a presentiment. He now accused Jean Oullier of cruelty and injustice. The sternness of the old Vendéan in refusing him the consolation of a last farewell seemed to him intolerable; it was surely impossible that he should be actually denied a last look. He rebelled at the thought, and resolved to see Mary, no matter what might come of it.

Michel knew the internal arrangements of the miller's house. Petit-Pierre's room was the miller's own, above the grindstones. This was, naturally, the place of honor in the establishment. The sisters slept in a little room adjoining this chamber. A narrow window in the smaller room looked down upon the outside mill-wheel which kept the machinery at work. For the present, however, all was still, lest the noise should prevent the sentries from hearing other sounds.

Michel waited till it was dark,--an hour perhaps; then he went to the buildings. A light could be seen in the narrow window. He threw a plank on a paddle of the wheel and managed, by resting his body against the wall, to climb spoke by spoke to the highest point of the wheel; there he found himself on a level with the narrow casement. He raised his head and looked into the tiny room.

Mary was alone, sitting on a stool, her elbow resting on the bed, her head in her hands. Now and then a heavy sigh escaped her; from time to time her lips moved as though she were murmuring a prayer. The young man tapped against a window-pane. At the sound she raised her head, recognized him through the glass, and ran to him.

"Hush!" he said.

"You! you here!" cried Mary.

"Yes, I."

"Good God! what do you want?"

"Mary, it is more than a week since I have spoken to you, almost a week since I have seen you. I have come to bid you farewell before I go to meet my fate."

"Farewell! and why farewell?"

"I have come to say farewell, Mary," said the youth, firmly.

"Oh, you do not mean to die?"

Michel did not answer.

"No, no; you will not die," continued Mary. "I have prayed so much that God must hear me. But now that you have seen me, now that you have spoken to me, you must go,--go!"

"Why must I leave you so soon? Do you hate me so intensely that you cannot bear to see me?"

"No, you know it is not that, my friend;" said Mary. "But Bertha is in the next room; she may have heard you come. She may be hearing what you say. Good God! what would become of me--of me who have sworn to her that I did not love you!"

"You may have sworn that to her, but to me you swore otherwise. You swore that you loved me, and it was upon the faith of that love that I consented to conceal my own."

"Michel, I entreat you, go away!"

"No, Mary, I will not go until your lips have repeated to me again what they said on the island of Jonchère."

"But that love is almost a crime!" said Mary, desperately. "Michel, my friend, I blush, I weep, when I think of that momentary weakness."

"Mary! I swear to you that to-morrow you shall have no such remorse, you shall shed no tears of that kind."

"Oh, you mean to die! No, no; do not say it! Leave me the hope that my sufferings may bring you a better fate than mine. Hush! Don't you hear? Some one is coming! Go, Michel; go, go!"

"One kiss, Mary!"

"No."

"Yes, yes; a last kiss--the last!"

"Never, my friend."

"Mary, it is to a dying man!"

Mary gave a cry; her lips touched his forehead; but the instant they had done so, and while she was closing the window hastily, Bertha appeared in the doorway.

When the latter saw her sister, pale, perturbed, scarcely able to support herself, she rushed, with the terrible instinct of jealousy, to the window, opened it violently, leaned out, and saw a shadow disappearing in the darkness.

"Michel was with you, Mary!" she cried, with trembling lips.

"Sister," said Mary, falling on her knees; "I swear--"

Bertha interrupted her.

"Don't swear, don't lie. I heard his voice."

Bertha pushed Mary away from her with such violence that the latter fell flat upon

the floor. Then Bertha, springing over her sister's body, furious as a lioness deprived of her young, rushed from the room and down the stairs, crossed the mill, and reached the courtyard. There, to her astonishment, she saw Michel sitting on the doorstep beside Jean Oullier. She went straight up to him.

"How long have you been here?" she said in a curt, harsh voice.

Michel made a gesture as if to say, "I leave Jean Oullier to reply."

"Monsieur le baron and I have been talking here for the last half hour or more."

Bertha looked fixedly at the old Vendéan.

"That is singular!" she said.

"Why singular?" asked Jean Oullier, fixing his own eyes steadily upon her.

"Because," said Bertha, addressing Michel and not Jean Oullier. "because I thought I heard you talking with my sister at her window, and saw you climbing down the mill-wheel which you had mounted to reach her."

"Monsieur le baron doesn't look as if he had just performed such an acrobatic feat," said Jean Oullier, sarcastically.

"Then who do you suppose it was, Jean?" said Bertha, stamping her foot impatiently.

"Oh, some of those drunkards over there, who were playing a trick."

"But I tell you that Mary was pale and trembling."

"With fright," said Jean Oullier. "She hasn't got your iron nerves."

Bertha grew thoughtful. She knew the feelings that Jean Oullier cherished against the young baron; therefore she could hardly suppose he was in league with him against her. After a moment's silence her thoughts reverted to Mary, and she remembered that she had left her almost fainting.

"Yes," she said; "yes. Jean Oullier, you are right. The poor child must have been frightened, and I, with my rough ways, have made matters worse. Oh," she muttered,

"this love is making me beside myself!"

Then, without another word to Michel or Jean Oullier, she rushed into the mill.

Jean Oullier looked at Michel, who lowered his eyes.

"I shall not reproach you," he said to the young man, "but you must see now on what a powder-barrel you are stepping. What would have happened if I had not been here to lie, God forgive me! as if I were a liar born."

"Yes," said Michel, "you are right, Jean,--I know it; and the proof is that I swear to follow you, for I see plainly I can't stay here any longer."

"That's right. The Nantes men will start in a few moments; the marquis joins them with his division; start yourself at the same time, but fall behind and join me, you know where."

Michel went off to fetch his horse, and Jean Oullier, meantime, obtained his last instructions from the marquis. The Vendéans camping in the orchard now formed in line, their arms sparkling in the shadows. A quiver of repressed impatience ran through the ranks.

Presently Petit-Pierre, followed by the principal leaders, came out of the house and advanced to the Vendéans. She was hardly recognized before a mighty cry of enthusiasm burst from every mouth. Sabres were drawn to salute her for whose cause each man was prepared to die.

"My friends," said Petit-Pierre, advancing, "I promised I would be present at the first armed meeting; and here I am, never to leave you. Fortunate or unfortunate, your fate shall be mine henceforth. If I cannot--as my son would have done--rally you to where my white plume shines, I can--as he would--die with you! Go, sons of giants, go where duty and honor call you!"

Frantic cries of "Vive Henri V! Vive Marie-Caroline!" welcomed this allocution. Petit-Pierre addressed a few more words to those of the leaders whom she knew; and

then the little troop on which rested the fate of the oldest monarchy in Europe took its way in the direction of Vieille-Vigne.

During this time Bertha had been showering attentions on her sister, all the more eager because of her sudden change of feeling. She carried her to her bed and bathed her face in cold water. Mary opened her eyes and looked about her in a bewildered way, murmuring in a low voice Michel's name. Her heart revived before her reason.

Bertha shuddered. She was about to ask Mary to forgive her violence, but Michel's name on her sister's lips stopped the words in her throat. For the second time the serpents of jealousy were gnawing at her heart.

Just then the acclamations with which the Vendéans welcomed the address of Petit-Pierre reached her ears. She went to the window of the next room and saw the waving line of a dark mass among the trees, lighted here and there with flashes. It was the column just beginning its march. The thought struck her that Michel, who was certainly with that column, had gone without bidding her good-bye; and she returned, thoughtful, uneasy, and gloomy to her sister's bedside.

XV.

JAILER AND PRISONER ESCAPE TOGETHER.

At daybreak on the 4th of June the tocsin sounded from all the bell-towers in the districts of Clisson, Montaigu, and Machecoul. The tocsin is the drum-call of the Vendéans. Formerly, that is to say in the days of the great war, when its harsh and sinister clang resounded through the land the whole population rose in a mass and ran to meet the enemy.

How many noble things those people must have done to enable us to forget, almost forget, that their enemy was--France!

Happily,--and this proves the immense progress we have made in the past forty years,--happily, we say, in 1832 the tocsin appeared to have lost its power. If a few

peasants, answering its impious call, left their ploughs and seized the guns hidden in the hedges, the majority continued calmly along the furrows, and contented themselves by listening to the signal for revolt with that profoundly meditative air which suits so well with the Vendéan cast of countenance.

And yet, by ten o'clock that morning, a rather numerous body of insurgents had already fought an engagement with the regular army. Strongly intrenched in the village of Maisdon, this troop sustained a strong attack directed against it, and had only given way before superior numbers. It then effected its retreat in better order than was customary with the Vendéans even after a slight or momentary reverse.

The reason was, and we repeat it, that La Vendée was no longer fighting for the triumph of a great principle, but simply from a great devotion. If we are now making ourselves the historian of this war (after our usual fashion of writing history) it is because we hope to draw from the very facts we relate the satisfactory conclusion that civil war will soon be impossible in France.

Now, this devotion of which we speak was that of men of noble, elevated hearts, who felt themselves bound by their fathers' past, and who gave their honor, their fortunes, and their life in support of the old adage, Noblesse oblige. That is the reason why the retreat was made in good order. Those who executed it were no longer undisciplined peasants, but gentlemen; and each man fought not only from devotion but also from pride,--pride for himself, and, in a measure, for others.

The Whites were immediately attacked again at Château-Thébaud by a detachment of fresh troops sent by General Dermoncourt to pursue them. The royalists lost several men at the passage of the Maine, but having succeeded in putting that river between themselves and their pursuers, they were able to form a junction on the left bank with the Nantes men, whom we lately saw departing, full of enthusiasm, from the Jacquet mill, and who since then had been reinforced by the men from Légé and the division of the Marquis de Souday. This reinforcement brought the effective

strength of this column, which was under Gaspard's command, to about eight hundred men.

The next morning it marched on Vieille-Vigne, hoping to disarm the National Guard at that point; but learning that the little town was occupied by a much superior force, to which would be added in a few hours the troops assembled at Aigrefeuille (where the general had collected a large body for the purpose of throwing them on any point in case of necessity), the Vendéan leader determined to attack the village of Chêne, intending to capture and occupy it.

The peasants were scattered through the neighborhood. Hidden among the wheat, which was already of a good height, they worried the Blues with incessant sharp-shooting, following the tactics of their fathers. The men of Nantes and the country gentlemen formed in column and prepared to carry the village by main force, attacking it along the chief street which runs from end to end of it.

At the end of that street ran a brook; but the bridge had been destroyed the night before, nothing remaining of it but a few disjointed timbers. The soldiers, withdrawn into the houses and ambushed behind the windows, protected with mattresses, poured a cross-fire down upon the Whites, which repulsed them twice and paralyzed their onset, until, electrified by the example of their leaders, the Vendéan soldiers flung themselves into the water, crossed the little river, met the Blues with the bayonet, hunted them from house to house, and drove them to the extremity of the village, where they found themselves face to face with a battalion of the 44th of the line which the general had just sent forward to support the little garrison of Chêne.

The sound of the firing reached the mill, which Petit-Pierre had not yet quitted. She was still in that room on the first floor where we have already seen her. Pale, with eager eyes, she walked up and down in the grasp of a feverish agitation she could not quell. From time to time she stopped on the threshold of the door, listening to the dull roll of the musketry which the breeze brought to her ears like the rumbling of

distant thunder; then, she passed her hand across her forehead, which was bathed in sweat, stamped her feet in anger, and at last sat down in the chimney-corner opposite to the Marquis de Souday, who, though no less agitated, no less impatient than Petit-Pierre, only sighed from time to time in a dolorous way.

How came the Marquis de Souday, whom we have seen so impatient to begin all over again his early exploits in the great war, to be thus tied down to a merely expectant position? We must explain this to our readers.

The day of the engagement at Maisdon Petit-Pierre, in accordance with the promise she had given to her friends, made ready to join them and share in the fight itself. But the royalist chiefs were alarmed at the great responsibility her courage and ardor threw upon them. They felt that the dangers were too many under the still uncertain chances of this war, and they decided that until the whole army were assembled they could not allow Petit-Pierre to risk her life in some petty and obscure encounter.

Respectful representations were therefore made to her, all of which failed to change her strong determination. The Vendéan leaders then took counsel together and decided among themselves to keep her as it were a prisoner, and to appoint one of their own number to remain beside her, and prevent her, by force if necessary, from leaving her quarters.

In spite of the care the Marquis de Souday (who was of the council) took in voting and intriguing to throw the choice on one of his colleagues, he himself was selected; and that is why he was now, to his utter despair, compelled to stay in the Jacquet mill beside the miller's fire, instead of being at Chêne and under the fire of the Blues.

When the first sounds of the combat reached the mill Petit-Pierre endeavored to persuade the marquis to let her join her faithful Vendéans: but the old gentleman was not to be shaken; prayers, promises, threats, were all in vain against his strict fidelity to orders received. But Petit-Pierre could plainly see on his face the deep

annoyance he felt; for the marquis, who was little of a courtier by nature, was unable to conceal it. Stopping short before him just as one of the sighs of impatience we have already mentioned escaped him, she said:--

"It seems to me, marquis, that you are not extraordinarily delighted with my companionship?"

"Oh!" exclaimed the marquis, endeavoring, but without success, to give a tone of shocked denial to his interjection.

"Yes," said Petit-Pierre, who had an object in persisting, "I think you are not at all pleased with the post of honor assigned to you."

"On the contrary, I accepted that post with the deepest gratitude; but--"

"Ah! there's a but? I knew it!" said Petit-Pierre, who seemed determined to fathom the old gentleman's mind on this point.

"Isn't there always a but in every earthly thing?" replied the marquis, evasively.

"What is yours?"

"Well, I regret not to be able, while showing myself worthy of the trust my comrades have laid upon me, I certainly do regret not being able to shed my blood on your behalf, as they are doing, no doubt, at this very moment."

Petit-Pierre sighed heavily.

"I have no doubt," she said, "that our friends are even now regretting your absence. Your experience and tried courage would certainly be of the utmost help to them."

The marquis swelled with pride.

"Yes, yes," he said; "I know they'll repent of it."

"I am sure of it. My dear marquis, will you let me tell you, with my hand on my conscience, the whole truth as I see it?"

"Oh, yes; I entreat you."

"Well, I think they distrusted you as much as they did me."

"Impossible!"

"Stop! you don't see what I mean. They said to themselves: 'A woman would hinder us in marching; we should have to think of her if we retreat. In any case we must devote to the security of her person a troop of soldiers we could better employ elsewhere.' They did not choose to believe that I have succeeded in conquering the weakness of my body, and that my courage is equal to the greatness of my task; if they think so of me, can you wonder if they think it of you?"

"Of me!" cried Monsieur de Souday, furious at the mere suggestion. "I have given proofs of courage all my life!"

"All the world knows that, my dear marquis; but perhaps, remembering your age, they may have thought that your bodily vigor, like mine, was no longer equal to the ardor of your spirit."

"Oh, that's too much!" cried the old soldier of former days in a tone of the deepest indignation. "Why! there hasn't been a day for the last fifteen years that I haven't been six or eight hours in the saddle,--sometimes ten, sometimes twelve! In spite of my white hairs I can stand fatigue as well as any man. See what I can do still!"

Seizing the stool on which he was sitting, he struck it with such violence against the stone chimney-piece that he shattered the stool to bits and made a deep gash in the mantel. Brandishing above his head the leg of the hapless stool which remained in his hand, he cried out:--

"How many of your young dandies, Maître Petit-Pierre, could do that?"

"I never doubted your powers, my dear marquis; and that is why I say those gentlemen have made a great mistake in treating you like an invalid."

"An invalid! I? God's death!" cried the marquis, more and more exasperated, and totally forgetting the presence of the person with whom he was speaking. "An

invalid! I? Well, this very evening, I'll tell them I renounce these functions, which are those, not of a gentleman, but a jailer."

"That's right!" interjected Petit-Pierre.

"Functions, which for the last two hours," continued the marquis, striding up and down the room, "I have been sending to all the devils."

"Ah, ha!"

"And to-morrow, yes, I say to-morrow, I'll show them who's an invalid, that I will!"

"Alas!" said Petit-Pierre in a melancholy tone, "tomorrow may not belong to us, my poor marquis; you are wrong to count upon it."

"Why so?"

"You know very well the uprising is not as general as we hoped it might be. Who knows whether the shots we now hear may not be the last fired in defence of the white flag?"

"Hum!" growled the marquis, with the fury of a bulldog tugging at his chain.

Just then a call for help from the farther end of the orchard put an end to their talk. They both ran to the spot, and there saw Bertha, whom the marquis had stationed as an outside lookout, bringing in a wounded peasant, whom she had scarcely strength enough to support. Mary and Rosine had also rushed out at the cry. The peasant was a young gars from twenty to twenty-two years of age, with his shoulder shattered by a ball. Petit-Pierre ran up to him and placed him on a chair, where he fainted.

"For heaven's sake, retire," said the marquis to Petit-Pierre; "my daughters and I will dress the poor devil's wound."

"Pray, why should I retire?" said Petit-Pierre.

"Because the sight of that wound is not one that everybody can stand; I am afraid it is more than you have strength to bear."

"Then you are like all the rest; and you lead me to suppose that our friends were

right in the judgment they formed on you as well as on me."

"I don't see that; how so?"

"You think, as they do, that I am wanting in courage." Then, as Mary and Bertha were beginning to examine the wound, "Let the poor fellow's wound alone," she continued, "I--and I alone, do you hear me?--will dress it."

Taking her scissors Petit-Pierre slit up the sleeve of the Vendéan's jacket, which was stuck to the arm by the dried blood, opened the wound, washed it, covered it with lint and deftly bandaged it. Just as she was finishing her work the wounded peasant opened his eyes and recovered his senses.

"What news?" asked the marquis, unable to restrain himself a moment longer.

"Alas!" said the man; "our gars, who were conquerors at first, are now repulsed."

Petit-Pierre, who did not blanch while attending to the wound, grew as white as the linen she was using for bandages; and putting in a last pin to hold it, she seized the marquis by the arm and drew him toward the door.

"Marquis," she said, "you, who saw the Blues in the great war, tell me, what was done when the nation was in danger?"

"Done?" cried the marquis. "Why, everybody ran to arms."

"Even the women?"

"Yes, the women; even the old men, even the children."

"Marquis, it may be that the white flag will fall to-day never to rise again. Why do you condemn me to making barren and impotent prayers and vows in its behalf?"

"But just reflect," said the marquis; "suppose a ball were to strike you."

"Oh! do you think my son's cause would be injured if my bloody and bullet-riddled clothing were carried on a pike in front of our battalions?"

"No, no!" cried the marquis, passionately. "I would curse my native soil if the stones themselves did not rise at such a sight."

"Then come with me and let us join our troops."

"But," replied the marquis, with less determination than he had previously shown against Petit-Pierre's entreaties,--as if the idea of being regarded as an invalid had shaken the firmness with which he executed his orders,--"but I promised you should not leave the mill."

"Well, I release you from that promise," said Petit-Pierre; "and I, who know your valor, order you to follow me. Come, marquis, we may still be in time to rally victory to our flag; if not, if we are too late, we can at least die with our friends."

So saying, Petit-Pierre darted through the courtyard and orchard, followed by Bertha and by the marquis, who thought it his duty to renew, from time to time, his remonstrances; although, in the depths of his heart, he was delighted with the turn affairs were taking.

Mary and Rosine remained behind to care for the wounded.

XVI.

THE BATTLEFIELD.

The Jacquet mill was about three miles from the village of Chêne. Petit-Pierre, guided by the noise of the firing, did half the way running; and it was with great difficulty that the marquis stopped her as they neared the scene of action, and succeeded in inspiring her with some prudence, lest she should plunge head-foremost into the government troops.

On turning one of the flanks of the line of sharp-shooters, whose firing, as we have said, was her guide, Petit-Pierre, followed by her companions, came upon the rear of the Vendéan army, which had, in truth, lost all the ground we saw it gain in the morning, and was now driven back some distance beyond the village of Chêne. On catching sight of Petit-Pierre, as, with flying hair and gasping breath she came up the hill toward the main body of the Vendéans, the whole of the little army burst into a

roar of enthusiasm.

Gaspard, who, together with his officers, was firing like a common soldier, turned round at the shout and saw Petit-Pierre, Bertha, and the Marquis de Souday. The latter, in the rapidity of their course, had lost his hat, and now appeared with his white hair flying in the wind. It was to him that Gaspard spoke first.

"Is this how the Marquis de Souday keeps his word?" he said in an irritated tone.

"Monsieur," replied the marquis, sharply, "it is not of a poor invalid like me that you ought to ask that question."

Petit-Pierre hastened to intervene. Her party was not strong enough to allow of dissensions among its leaders.

"Souday is bound, as you are, to obey me," she said; "I seldom claim the exercise of that right; but to-day I have thought proper to do so. I assume my place as generalissimo, and ask, how goes the day, lieutenant?"

Gaspard shook his head significantly.

"The Blues are in force," he said, "and my scouts report that reinforcements are reaching them."

"So much the better," cried Petit-Pierre; "they will be so many more to tell France how we died."

"You cannot mean that, Madame!"

"I am not Madame here; I am a soldier. Fight on, without regard to me; advance your line of skirmishers and double their fire."

"Yes; but first, to the rear!"

"To the rear! who?"

"You, in God's name!"

"Nonsense! to the front you mean."

Snatching Gaspard's sword, Petit-Pierre put her hat on the point of it as she sprang in the direction of the village crying out:--

"Those who love me, follow me!"

Gaspard vainly attempted to restrain her, and even caught her arm; but Petit-Pierre, light and agile, escaped him and continued her way toward the line of houses whence the soldiers, observing the renewed movement on the part of the Vendéans, were beginning a murderous fire.

Seeing the danger that Petit-Pierre was incurring, all the Vendéans rushed forward to make a rampart of their bodies, and the effect of such a rush was so sudden, so powerful, that in a few seconds they were over the brook and into the village, where they came face to face with the Blues. The clash was almost instantly followed by a terrible mêlée. Gaspard, his mind wholly occupied by one thing, the safety of Petit-Pierre, succeeded in reaching her and flinging her back among his men. So intent was he on saving the august life he felt that God himself had intrusted to him, that he gave no thought to his own safety, and did not see that a soldier posted at the corner of the first house was aiming at him.

It would have been all over with the Chouan leader if the marquis had not observed the threatened danger. Slipping along the wall of the house he threw up the muzzle of the weapon just as its owner fired it. The ball struck a chimney; the soldier turned furiously on the marquis, and tried to stab him with his bayonet, which the latter evaded by throwing back his body. The old gentleman was about to reply with a pistol-shot when a ball broke the weapon in his hand.

"So much the better!" he cried, drawing his sabre and dealing so terrible a blow that the soldier rolled at his feet like an ox felled by a club; "I prefer the white weapon." Then, brandishing his sabre he cried out: "There, General Gaspard, what do you think of your invalid now?"

Bertha had followed Petit-Pierre, her father and the Vendéans; but her thoughts were

much less on the soldiers than on what was passing immediately about her. She looked for Michel, striving to distinguish him in the whirlwind of men and horses that passed beside her.

The government troops, surprised by the suddenness and vigor of the attack, retreated step by step; the National guard of Vieille-Vigne had retired altogether. The ground was heaped with dead. The result was that as the Blues no longer replied to the straggling fire of the gars posted in the vineyards and gardens around the village, Maître Jacques, who commanded the skirmishers, was able to assemble his men in a body. Putting himself at their head he led them through a by-way which skirted the gardens and fell upon the flank of the soldiers.

The latter, whose resistance was becoming by this time more resolute, sustained the attack valiantly, and forming in line across the main street of the village, presented a front to their new assailants. Soon a pause of hesitation appeared among the Vendéans, the Blues regained the advantage, and their column having, in its charge, passed the opening of the little by-way by which Maître-Jacques and his men had debouched, the latter with five or six of his "rabbits," among whom figured Aubin Courte-Joie and Trigaud-Vermin, found themselves cut off from the body of their comrades. Whereupon Maître Jacques, rallying his men about him, set his back to a wall to protect his rear, and sheltering beneath the scaffolding of a house which was just being built at the corner of the street, prepared to sell his life dearly.

Courte-Joie, armed with a small double-barrelled gun, fired incessantly on the soldiers; each of his balls was the death of a man. As for Trigaud, his hands being free, for the cripple was strapped to his shoulders by a girth, he man[oe]uvred with wonderful adroitness a scythe with its handle reversed, which served him as lance and sabre both.

Just as Trigaud, with a backward blow, brought down a gendarme whom Courte-Joie had only dismounted, great shouts of triumph burst from the

government ranks, and Maître Jacques and his men beheld a woman in a riding-habit in the hands of the Blues, who seemed, even in the midst of the fight, to be transported with joy. It was Bertha, who, still preoccupied by her search for Michel, had imprudently advanced too far and was captured by the soldiers. They, being deceived by her dress, mistook her for the Duchesse de Berry; hence their joy.

Maître Jacques was misled like the rest. Anxious to repair the blunder he had made in the forest of Touvois, he made a sign to his men, and together they abandoned their defensive position, and rushing forward, thanks to a great swathe mown down by Trigaud's terrible scythe, they reached the prisoner, seized her, and placed her in their midst.

The soldiers, disappointed, renewed their efforts, and flung themselves on Maître Jacques and his men, who had promptly regained their shelter against the wall of the house; and the little group became a centre toward which converged the points of twenty-five bayonets, and a continuous fusillade from the circumference of the circle. Already two Vendéans were dead; Maître Jacques, struck by a ball which broke his wrist, was forced to drop his gun and take to his sabre, which he wielded with his left hand. Courte-Joie had exhausted his cartridges; and Trigaud's scythe was almost the only protection left to the four surviving Vendéans,--an efficacious protection hitherto, for it laid the assailants on the ground in such serried ranks that the soldiers no longer dared to approach the terrible mendicant.

But Trigaud, wishing to strike a direct blow at a horseman, missed his aim. The scythe struck a stone and flew into a thousand bits; the giant fell to his knees, so violent was the force of his impulsion; the girth which fastened Courte-Joie to his shoulders broke, and the cripple rolled into the midst of the fray.

A loud and joyous hurrah greeted this accident, which delivered the formidable giant into the hands of his enemies; and a National guard was in the act of raising his bayonet to stab the fallen cripple, when Bertha, taking a pistol from her belt, fired

upon the man and brought him down upon the body of Courte-Joie.

Trigaud had risen with an agility scarcely to be expected of so enormous a bulk; his separation from Courte-Joie and the danger the latter was in increased his strength tenfold. Using the handle of his scythe, he disposed of one man and disabled another. With a single kick he sent to a distance of several feet the body of the man who had fallen upon his friend, and taking the latter in his arms, as a nurse lifts a child, he joined Bertha and Maître Jacques beneath the scaffolding.

While Courte-Joie lay on the pavement, his eyes, roving about him with the rapidity and acuteness of a man in peril of death, seeking on all sides for a chance of escape, fell on the scaffolding where they noticed a heap of stones collected by the masons for the construction of the wall.

"Get under shelter in the doorway," he said to Bertha, when, thanks to Trigaud, he found himself beside her; "perhaps I can return the service you have just done me. As for you, Trigaud, let the red-breeches come as near as they please."

In spite of Trigaud's thick brain he at once understood what his companion wanted of him; for, little as the sound was in harmony with the situation, he broke into a peal of laughter that resembled the braying of trumpets.

The soldiers, seeing the three disarmed men, and wishing, at any cost, to recapture the woman whom they still supposed to be the Duchesse de Berry, came nearer, calling out to the Vendéans to surrender. But, just as they stepped beneath the scaffolding, Trigaud, who had placed Courte-Joie near Bertha, sprang to one of the joists that supported the whole erection, seized it with both hands, shook it, and tore it from the ground. In an instant the planks tipped, and the stones piled upon them followed their incline and fell like hail, beyond Trigaud, upon eight or ten of the foremost soldiers.

At the same moment the Nantes men, led by Gaspard and the Marquis de Souday, making a desperate effort, firing, sabring, bayoneting hand to hand, had driven back

the Blues, who now retreated to their line of battle in the open country, where their superiority in numbers and also in weapons would infallibly give them the victory.

The Vendéans, rash as the effort was, were about to risk an attack, when Maître Jacques, whom his men had rejoined, and who, in spite of his wound, still continued to fight, said a few words in Gaspard's ear. The latter immediately, and in spite of the commands and entreaties of Petit-Pierre, ordered a retreat and again took up the position he had occupied an hour earlier on the other side of the village.

Petit-Pierre was ready to tear her hair with anger, and urgently demanded explanations, which Gaspard did not give her until he had ordered a halt.

"We are now surrounded by five or six thousand men," he said, "and we ourselves are scarcely six hundred. The honor of the flag is safe, and that is all we can hope for."

"Are you certain of that?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"Look for yourself," he replied, taking her to a rise in the ground from which could be seen, converging on all sides toward the village of Chêne, dark masses topped with bayonets which sparkled in the rays of the setting sun. There, too, they heard the sound of drums and bugles approaching from all the points of the horizon.

"You see," continued Gaspard, "that in less than an hour we shall be completely surrounded, and no resource will then remain to these brave men--who, like myself, cannot away with Louis Philippe's prisons--but to get themselves killed upon the spot."

Petit-Pierre stood for some moments in gloomy silence; then, convinced of the truth of what the Vendéan leader told her, beholding the destruction of the hopes which a few moments earlier had seemed to her ardent mind so strong and dauntless, she felt her courage desert her, and she became, what she really was, a woman; she, who had so lately braved fire and sword with the nerve of a hero, sat down by the wayside and wept, disdaining to conceal the tears which furrowed her cheeks.

XVII.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

Gaspard, having rejoined his companions, thanked them for their services, told them of the state of things, and dismissed them for better times,--advising them to disperse at once, and thus escape all pursuit by the soldiers. Then he returned to Petit-Pierre, whom he found in the same place, and around her the Marquis de Souday, Bertha, and a few Vendéans who would not think of their own safety till certain of hers.

"Well," asked Petit-Pierre when Gaspard returned to her alone, "have they gone?"

"Yes; they could do no more than they have done."

"Poor souls! what troubles await them!" said Petit-Pierre. "Why has God refused me the consolation of pressing them to my heart? But I should never have had the strength; they do right to leave me without farewell. Twice to suffer thus in life is too much agony. Those days at Cherbourg!--I hoped I might never see their like again."

"Now," said Gaspard, "we must think of your safety."

"Oh, never mind me personally," replied Petit-Pierre; "my sole regret is that the balls did not choose to come my way. My death would not have given you the victory, that is true; but at least the struggle would have been glorious. And now what are we to do?"

"Wait for better days. You have proved to the French people that a valiant heart is beating in your bosom. Courage is the principal virtue they demand of their rulers; they will remember your action, never fear."

"God wills it!" said Petit-Pierre, rising and leaning on Gaspard's arm, who led her from the hilltop into the road across the plain. The government troops, who did not know the country, were forced to keep to the main roads.

Gaspard guided the little company, which ran no risk in the open country, except from scouts--thanks to the knowledge Maître Jacques possessed of paths that were almost impassable; they reached the neighborhood of the Jacquet mill without so much as seeing a tricolor cockade.

As they went along, Bertha approached her father and asked him whether in the midst of the mêlée he had seen or heard of Baron Michel; but the old gentleman, horrified at the issue of the insurrection prepared with so much care and so quickly stifled, was in the worst of humors, and answered gruffly that for the last two days no one knew what had become of the Baron de la Logerie; probably he was frightened, and had basely renounced the glory he might have won and the alliance which would have been the reward of his glory.

This answer filled Bertha with consternation. Useless, however, to say that she did not believe one word of what her father said; but her heart trembled at an idea which alone seemed to her probable,--namely, that Michel had been killed, or at any rate grievously wounded. She resolved to make inquiries of every one until she discovered something as to the fate of the man she loved. She first questioned all the Vendéans. None of them had seen Michel; but some, impelled by the old hatred against his father, expressed themselves about the son in terms that were not less vehement than those of the marquis himself.

Bertha grew frantic with distress; nothing short of palpable, visible, undeniable proof could have forced her to admit that she had made a choice unworthy of her, and, though all appearances were against Michel, her love, becoming more ardent, more impetuous under the pressure of such accusations, gave her strength to regard them as calumnies. A few moments earlier her heart was torn, her brain maddened under the idea that Michel had met his death in the struggle; and now that glorious death had become a hope, a consolation to her grief. She was frantic to acquire the cruel certainty, and even thought of returning to Chêne, visiting the battlefield, in

search of her lover's body, as Edith sought that of Harold; she even dreamed of avenging him on his murderers after vindicating his memory from her father's aspersions. The girl was reflecting on the pretext she could best employ to remain behind the rest and return to Chêne, when Aubin Courte-Joie and Trigaud, the rear-guard of the company, came up and were about to pass her. She breathed more freely; they, no doubt, could throw some light upon the matter.

"You, my brave friends," she said, "can you give me news of Monsieur de la Logerie?"

"Yes, indeed, my dear young lady," replied Courte-Joie.

"Ah!" cried Bertha, with the eagerness of hope, "he has not left the division as they say he has, has he?"

"He has left it," replied Courte-Joie.

"When?"

"The evening before the fight at Maisdon."

"Good God!" cried Bertha, in a tone of anguish. "Are you sure?"

"Quite sure. I saw him meet Jean Oullier at the Croix-Philippe; and we walked a little way together."

"With Jean Oullier!" cried Bertha. "Oh! then I am satisfied; Jean Oullier was not deserting. If Michel is with Jean Oullier he has done nothing cowardly or dishonorable."

Suddenly a terrible thought came into her mind. Why this sudden interest on Jean Oullier's part for the young man? Why had Michel followed Jean Oullier rather than the marquis? These questions, which the young girl put to herself, filled her heart with sinister forebodings.

"And you say you saw the two on their way to Clisson?" she said to Courte-Joie.

"With my own eyes."

"Do you know what is going on at Clisson?"

"It is too far from here to have got the details as yet," replied Courte-Joie; "but a gars from Sainte-Lumine overtook us just now and said that a devilish firing had been going on since ten o'clock in the morning over against Sèvre."

Bertha did not answer; her ideas had taken another course. She saw Michel led to his death by Jean Oullier's hatred; she fancied the poor lad wounded, panting, abandoned, lying helpless on some lonely and bloody moor, calling on her to save him.

"Do you know any one who could guide me to Jean Oullier?" she asked Courte-Joie.

"To-day?"

"Now, this instant."

"The roads are covered with the red-breeches."

"The wood-paths are not."

"But it is almost night."

"We shall be all the safer. Find me a guide; if not, I shall start alone."

The two men looked at each other.

"No one shall guide you but me," said Aubin Courte-Joie. "Do I not owe your family a debt of gratitude? Besides, Mademoiselle Bertha, you did me, no later than to-day, a service I shall never forget,--in knocking up the bayonet of that National guard who was going to split me."

"Very good; then drop behind and wait for me here in this wheat-field," said Bertha. "I shall be back in fifteen minutes."

Courte-Joie and Trigaud lay down among the wheat ears, and Bertha, hastening her steps, rejoined Petit-Pierre and the Vendéans just as they were about to enter the mill. She went rapidly up to the little room she occupied with her sister, and hurriedly changed her clothes, which were covered with blood, for the dress of a

peasant-woman. Coming down, she found Mary busy among the wounded, and told her, without explaining her plan, not to feel uneasy if she did not see her again till the next day. She then returned to the wheat-field.

Reserved as she was in what she said to her sister, her face was so convulsed and agitated that Mary read upon it plainly the thoughts that filled her soul; she knew of Michel's disappearance, and she did not doubt that Bertha's sudden departure was caused by it. After the scene of the previous evening Mary dared not to question her sister; but a new anguish was added to those which already rent her heart, and when she was called to mount and attend Petit-Pierre in search of another refuge, she knelt down and prayed to God that her sacrifice might not be useless, and that it would please Him to protect both the life and honor of Bertha's affianced husband.

XVIII.

THE CHÂTEAU DE LA PÉNISSIÈRE.

While the Vendéans were making their useless but not inglorious fight at Chêne, forty-two of their number were sustaining a struggle at Pénissière de la Cour, of which the memory survives in history.

These forty-two royalists, who were part of the Clisson division, left that town intending to march to the village of Cugan, and there disarm the National Guard. A frightful storm forced them to find shelter in the château de la Pénissière, where a battalion of the 29th regiment of the line, informed of their movements, lost no time in besieging them.

La Pénissière is an ancient building, with a single story between the ground-floor and garret. It has fifteen irregularly shaped windows. The chapel backs against one corner of the château. Beyond it, joining the valley, are meadow-lands divided by evergreen hedges, which heavy rains sometimes transform into a lake. A battlemented wall, built by the Vendéans, surrounded the building.

The commanding officer of the battalion of the line had no sooner reconnoitred the situation than he ordered an immediate attack. After a short defence the exterior wall was abandoned, and the Vendéans retreated to the château, within which they barricaded themselves. Each man took his place on the ground-floor, and on the main-floor; and on both floors a bugler was stationed, who never ceased to sound his instrument throughout the combat, which began with rapid volleys from the windows, so well directed and so vigorous as to conceal the small number of the besieged.

Picked men and the best shots were chosen to fire; they discharged, almost without stopping, the heavy blunderbusses which their comrades reloaded and handed back to them. Each blunderbuss carried a dozen balls. The Vendéans fired five or six at once; the effect was that of a discharge of grape-shot. Twice the regular troops attempted an assault; they came within twenty paces of the château, but were forced to retreat.

The commander ordered a third attack, and while it was preparing, four men, assisted by a mason, approached the château by a gable-end, which had no outlook on the garden, and was therefore undefended. Once at the foot of the wall, the soldiers raised a ladder, and reaching the roof uncovered it, flung down into the garret inflammable substances, to which they set fire, and then retreated. Immediately a column of smoke burst from the roof, through which the flames soon forced their way.

The soldiers, uttering loud cries, again marched eagerly to the little citadel, which seemed to be flying a flag of flame. The besieged had discovered the conflagration, but there was no time to extinguish it; besides, the flames were pouring upward, and they trusted that after destroying the roof the fire might burn out of itself. Accordingly they replied to the shouts of their assailants with a terrible fusillade,--the bugles never ceasing for a single instant to sound their joyous and

warlike notes.

The Whites could hear the Blues saying to each other: "They are not men, they are devils!" and this military praise inspired them with fresh ardor.

Nevertheless, a reinforcement of fifty men having reached the besiegers, the commanding officers ordered the drummers to beat the charge; and the soldiers, emulous of each other, rushed for the fourth time upon the château. This time they reached the doors, which the sappers began to batter in. The Vendéan leaders ordered their men on the ground-floor up to the first floor; the men obeyed; and while one half of the besieged continued the firing, the other half pulled up the boards and broke through the ceilings, so that when the soldiers entered the building they were greeted with a volley at close quarters, poured down upon them from above through the rafters. Again, and for the fourth time, they were forced to retreat.

The commander of the battalion then ordered his men to do on the ground-floor what they had done in the attic. Fascines of gorse and dried fagots were thrown through the windows into the rooms of the lower floor; lighted torches were flung after them, and in a few moments the Vendéans were inclosed in fire above and below them. And still they fought. The volumes of smoke which issued from the window were striped, every second or two, with the scarlet flame of the blunderbusses; but the firing now became the vengeance of despair rather than an effort of defence. It seemed impossible for the little garrison to escape death.

The place was no longer tenable; beams and joists were on fire and were cracking beneath the feet of the Vendéans; tongues of flame began to dart here and there through the floor; at any moment the roof might fall in and crush them from above, or the floor give way and precipitate them into a gulf of flame. The smoke was suffocating.

The Vendéan leaders took a desperate resolution. They determined to make a sortie; but to give it any chance of success, the firing would have to be kept up to protect

the movement. The leaders asked if any would volunteer to sacrifice themselves for the safety of their comrades.

Eight men stepped forward.

The troop was then divided into two squads. Thirty-three men and a bugler were to gain, if possible, the farther extremity of the park, which was closed by a hedge only; the eight others, among them the second bugler, were left to protect the attempt.

In consequence of these arrangements, and while those who volunteered to remain were running from window to window and keeping up a vigorous fire, the others broke through the wall on the opposite side to where the soldiers were attacking, issued in good order with the bugler at their head, and made their way at a quick step toward the end of the park where the hedge stood. The soldiers fired upon them and rushed to intercept them. The Vendéans fired back, knocked over those who opposed them, escaped through the hedges, leaving five of their number dead, and scattered over the meadows, which were then under water. The bugler, who received three wounds, never ceased to sound his bugle.

As for the men who remained in the château, they still held out. Each time that the soldiers attempted to approach, a volley issued from the brazier and cut a swathe through their ranks. This lasted for half an hour. The bugle of the besieged never ceased to sound through the rattling of the volleys, the crackling of the flames, the rumbling of the falling timbers, like a sublime defiance hurled by these men at Death standing before them.

At last, an awful crash was heard; clouds of smoke and sparks rose high in air; the bugle was hushed, the firing ceased. The flooring had fallen in, and the little garrison were doubtless swallowed up in the burning gulf beneath them--unless a miracle had happened.

Such was the opinion of the soldiers, who, after watching the ruins for some

moments, and hearing no cry or moan that betrayed the presence of a living Vendéan, abandoned the furnace which was burning up the bodies of both friends and enemies; so that nothing remained on the scene of the struggle, lately so turbulent and noisy, but the red and smoking flames dying down in silence, and a few dead bodies lighted by the last glare of the conflagration.

Thus the scene remained for several hours of the night. But about one o'clock a man of more than ordinary height, gliding beside the hedges, or crawling when obliged to cross a path, inspected cautiously the surroundings of the château. Seeing nothing that warranted distrust, he made the round of the devastated building, examining attentively all the bodies he found; after which he disappeared among the shadows. Presently, however, he returned, carrying a man upon his back and accompanied by a woman.

These men and this woman, as our readers are of course aware, were Bertha, Courte-Joie, and Trigaud.

Bertha was pale; her firmness and her habitual resolution had given way to a sort of restless bewilderment. From time to time she hurried before her guides, and Courte-Joie was obliged to recall her to prudence. When the three debouched from the wood into the meadow lately occupied by the soldiers, and saw in front of them the fifteen openings which stood out, red and gaping, from the blackened wall, like so many vent-holes out of hell, the young girl's strength gave way; she fell upon her knees and cried out a name which her agony transformed into a sob. Then, rising like a man, she rushed to the burning ruins.

On her way she stumbled over something; that something was a dead body. With a horrible expression of anguish she stooped to look at the livid face, turning it toward her by the hair. Then, seeing other bodies scattered on the ground, she went wildly from one to another as if beside herself.

"Alas! mademoiselle," said Courte-Joie, "he is not here. To spare you this dreadful

sight, I had already ordered Trigaud, who came here first, to look at those bodies. He has seen Monsieur de la Logerie two or three times, and idiot though he be, you can be sure he would have recognized him were he here among the dead."

"Yes, yes, you are right; and if he is anywhere--" cried Bertha, pointing to the ruins; and before the two men could stop her, she sprang upon the sill of a window on the ground-floor, and there, standing on the heated stone, she looked down into the gulf of fire still belching at her feet, into which it almost seemed as though she were about to fling herself.

At a sign from Courte-Joie Trigaud seized the girl round her waist and placed her at some distance on the grass. Bertha made no resistance, for an idea had just crossed her brain which paralyzed her will.

"My God!" she cried, as if with a last expiring sigh of her former strength, "you denied me the power to defend him or to die with him; and you now deny me the consolation of giving burial to his body."

"But mademoiselle," said Courte-Joie, "if it is the will of the good God you must resign yourself to it."

"Never! never! never!" cried Bertha, with the excitement of despair.

"Alas!" said the cripple, "my heart is heavy too; for if Monsieur de la Logerie is down there, so is poor Jean Oullier."

Bertha groaned; in the selfishness of her grief she had never once thought of Jean Oullier. "It's true," continued Courte-Joie, "he dies as he wished to die--with arms in his hand; but that doesn't console me for thinking he is down there."

"Is there no hope?" cried Bertha. "Couldn't they have escaped in some way? Oh, let us look! let us search!"

Courte-Joie shook his head.

"I think it is impossible. After what that man of the thirty-three others who did

escape told us, it does not seem possible. Five of those who made the sortie were killed."

"But Jean Oullier and Monsieur Michel were among those who remained," said Bertha.

"No doubt; and that is why I have so little hope. See," said Courte-Joie, pointing to the walls, which rose from their foundations to the eaves without a fissure, and then recalling Bertha's eyes by a gesture to the furnace of the ground-floor, where the roof and the floors were still burning; "see, there is nothing left but charred remains and walls that threaten ruin. Courage, mademoiselle, courage, for there is not one chance in a hundred that your lover and Jean Oullier have escaped that wreck."

"No, no!" cried Bertha, rising. "No! I say he cannot, he shall not be dead! If it needed a miracle to save him God has performed it. I will dig those embers, I will sound those walls. I will have him, dead or living! I say I will; do you hear me Courte-Joie?"

Seizing in her white hands a beam which protruded its charred end through a window, Bertha made superhuman efforts to draw it toward her, as if with that lever she could lift the enormous mass of material and discover what it concealed.

"Don't think of it!" cried Courte-Joie, desperately; "the work is beyond your strength, mademoiselle, and above mine and even Trigaud's. Besides, we haven't time for it; the soldiers will return by daybreak, and they mustn't find us here. Let us go, mademoiselle; for Heaven's sake let us go at once!"

"You may go if you like," said Bertha, in a tone that allowed of no objections. "I shall stay here."

"Stay here!" exclaimed Courte-Joie, horrified.

"I shall stay. If the soldiers return it will no doubt be for the purpose of searching the ruins. I will throw myself at the feet of their commander; my prayers, my tears will persuade them to let me share in the work, and I shall find him--oh, yes, I shall find

him!"

"You are mistaken, mademoiselle; the red-breeches will know you as the daughter of the Marquis de Souday. If they don't shoot you, they'll take you prisoner. Come away! it will be daylight soon. Come, and if necessary," added Courte-Joie, alarmed at the girl's determination, "if necessary, I promise to bring you back to-morrow night."

"No, I tell you, no,--I will not go away!" answered the young girl. "Something tells me here" (and she struck her breast) "that he is calling me, he wants me."

Then, as Trigaud advanced, on a sign from Courte-Joie, apparently to seize her, she cried out, springing once more to the sill of the window:--

"Come a step nearer, and I will jump into that furnace."

Courte-Joie, perceiving that nothing could be obtained of Bertha by force, was about to resort to prayers, when Trigaud, who had remained standing with his arms stretched out in the position he had taken to seize the young girl, made a sign to his companion to be silent.

Courte-Joie, who knew by experience the extraordinary acuteness of the poor fool's senses, obeyed him. Trigaud listened.

"Are the soldiers returning?" asked Courte-Joie.

"No; it is not that," replied Trigaud.

Then, unbinding Courte-Joie, who was strapped as usual to his shoulders, he lay down flat on his stomach with his ear to the ground. Bertha, without coming down from her present post, turned her head to the mendicant and watched him. The movement he had made, the words he had said, caused her heart, she knew not why, to beat violently.

"Do you hear anything extraordinary?" asked Courte-Joie.

"Yes," replied Trigaud.

Then he made a sign to Courte-Joie and Bertha to listen likewise. Trigaud, as we know, was stingy of words.

Courte-Joie lay down with his ear to the earth. Bertha sprang down from the window, and it was but a second after she had laid her ear to the ground before she rose again, crying out:--

"They are alive! they are alive! Oh, my God, I thank thee!"

"Don't let us hope too soon," said Courte-Joie; "but I do hear a dull sound which seems to come from the depths of those ruins. But there were eight of them; we can't be sure the sound comes from the two we seek."

"Not sure, Aubin! My presentiment, which would not let me go away when you begged me, makes me sure of it. Our friends are there, I tell you; they found a shelter in some cellar where they are now imprisoned by the fall of these materials."

"It may be so," replied Courte-Joie.

"It is certainly so!" cried Bertha. "But how can we release them? How shall we reach the place where they are?"

"If they are in a vault, the vault must have an opening; if they are in a cellar, the cellar has a window."

"Well, then, if we can't find either we must dig out the earth and through the foundation-wall."

So saying, Bertha began to go round the building, dragging aside with frenzied motions the beams, stones, tiles, and other fragments which had fallen beside the outer wall and now hid its base.

Suddenly she gave a cry. Trigaud and Courte-Joie ran to her,--one on his great legs, the other on his stumps and hands, with the rapidity of a batrachian.

"Listen!" said Bertha, triumphantly.

Sure enough, on the spot where she stood they heard distinctly a dull but continued

sound coming from the depths of the ruined building,--a sound like that of some tool or instrument striking steady and regular blows on the foundations.

"This is the place," said Bertha, pointing to an enormous pile of rubbish heaped against the wall. "We shall find them here."

Trigaud set to work. He began by pushing away a whole section of the roof which had slid down outside the building and now lay vertically against the wall. Then he threw aside the loose stones piled there by the fall of a window-casing on the first floor; and finally, after wonderful feats of strength, he laid bare an opening through which the sounds of the labor of the buried men came to them distinctly.

Bertha wanted to pass through the opening as soon as it was practicable; but Trigaud held her back. He took a fallen lath, lit it by the embers, fastened the girth, which usually held Courte-Joie to his shoulders, round the latter's waist, and lowered him into the cavity.

Bertha and Trigaud held their breaths. Courte-Joie's voice was heard, speaking to some one; then he gave a signal to be hoisted up. Trigaud obeyed with the alacrity of a well-fed animal.

"Living? are they living?" cried Bertha, in anguish.

"Yes, mademoiselle, but for God's sake don't attempt to go down there; they are not in the cellar, but in a sort of niche beyond it. The opening through which they got there is blocked. We must break through the wall to reach them; and I am very much afraid that may bring down the roof of the cellar upon them. Let me direct Trigaud."

Bertha fell on her knees and prayed. Courte-Joie collected a number of dry laths and returned to the cellar; Trigaud followed him.

At the end of ten minutes, which seemed to Bertha as many centuries, a loud noise of crashing stones was heard. A cry of anguish escaped her; she darted to the opening and there met Trigaud coming up, bearing on his shoulder the body of a man bent double, whose pale face was hanging down upon the giant's breast. Bertha

recognized Michel.

"He is dead! Oh, my God! he is dead!" she cried, not daring to go up to him.

"No, no," said a voice from below, which Bertha recognized as that of Jean Oullier, "no, he is not dead."

At these words the girl sprang forward, took Michel from Trigaud's hands, laid him on the grass, and quite reassured by the beating of his heart, endeavored to bring back his senses by bathing his forehead with water from a pool.

XIX.

THE MOOR OF BOUAIMÉ.

While Bertha endeavored to bring Michel from his swoon (which was chiefly caused by suffocation) Jean Oullier reached the outer air, followed by Courte-Joie, whom Trigaud drew up by the same means he had used to lower him. A moment more and all three were safely outside.

"Ah ça! were you the only ones in there?" said Courte Joie to Jean Oullier.

"Yes."

"And the others?"

"They took refuge under the stairway; the ceiling fell before they had time to get to us."

"Are they dead?"

"I don't think so; for about an hour after the soldiers left we heard the stones moving and voices. We called to them, but they did not hear."

"It is a lucky chance we came."

"That it is; without you I could never have got through that wall, especially with the young baron in such a state. Ha! I've made a fine campaign of it, faith," muttered Jean Oullier, shaking his head as he looked at Bertha, who, having drawn Michel's

head and shoulders on her knees and brought him to his senses, was now expressing to him all the happiness she felt in recovering him.

"And it is not over yet," said Courte-Joie, ignorant of the meaning the old Vendéan gave to his words, and anxiously looking to the east, where a broad purple line announced that the day was breaking.

"What do you mean?" asked Jean Oullier.

"I mean that two hours more of darkness would have mightily helped our safety; a cripple, a fainting man, and a woman are not so easy to man[oe]uvre on a retreat. Besides, the victors in yesterday's fight will swarm upon the roads to-day--if they don't beat the woods."

"Yes; but I'm at ease now. I don't have that roof over my head."

"You are only half saved yet, my good Jean."

"Well, let us take precautions."

So saying, Jean Oullier began to search for the cartridge-boxes of the dead, and took their contents. Then he loaded his gun as coolly as though he were starting on a hunt, and went up to Bertha and Michel. The eyes of the latter were closed as if he were unconscious.

"Can you walk?" Jean Oullier said to him.

Michel did not answer. When he first opened his eyes he saw Bertha, and closed them hastily, conscious of the difficulties of his position.

"Can you walk?" repeated Bertha, in a tone which the latter could no longer pretend not to hear.

"I think so," he replied.

In point of fact he had only a flesh wound in the arm; the bone was not injured.

Bertha had examined the wound and slung the arm about his neck with her white silk cravat.

"If you can't walk," said Jean Oullier, "I'll carry you."

At this fresh proof of the change in Jean Oullier's feelings to the young baron, Bertha went up to him.

"You must explain to me why you took away my betrothed husband," she said, emphasizing the last two words; "and why you persuaded him to leave his post and be dragged into this affair which has exposed him, in spite of all the dangers he may have met, to serious and shameful accusations."

"If Monsieur de la Logerie's reputation has suffered through me," replied Jean Oullier, gently, "I will repair it."

"You?" said Bertha, more and more astonished.

"Yes," said Jean Oullier; "for I can and will say openly that with all his effeminate ways, this young man has shown himself to be full of courage and constancy."

"Will you really do that, Jean Oullier?" cried Bertha.

"Not only will I do it," said the old Vendéan, "but if my testimony is not enough I will get that of the brave men beside whom he fought,--for I now desire that his name be counted honorable and honored."

"Is it possible that you say that, Jean Oullier?"

Jean Oullier nodded.

"You who would rather see me dead than bearing that name?"

"That's how things change in this world, Mademoiselle Bertha. I desire now to see Monsieur Michel my master's son-in-law."

Jean Oullier said the words with a look so expressive and a voice so sad and meaning, that Bertha felt her heart tighten, and she thought involuntarily of Mary. She was about to question the old keeper, but, at that moment, the sound of trumpets came down upon the wind from the direction of Clisson.

"Courte-Joie was right!" exclaimed Jean Oullier. "The explanation you ask of me,

Bertha, you shall have as soon as circumstances permit; for the present we must think of our own safety." Then, listening attentively, he added: "Come, let us start! there's not an instant to lose, I'll answer for that."

Passing his hand through Michel's well arm to support him, he gave the signal to depart. Courte-Joie was already perched on Trigaud's shoulders.

"Which way shall we go?" he asked.

"Better make for the lonely farmhouse of Saint-Hilaire," replied Jean Oullier, who felt Michel staggering under his first few steps. "It is quite impossible that Monsieur Michel should do the twenty miles to Machecoul."

"Straight for Saint-Hilaire, then," said Courte-Joie.

In spite of their slow advance, by reason of Michel's feebleness in walking, they were not more than a few hundred steps from the farm, when Trigaud showed his rider with some pride a sort of club he had been peeling and polishing with his knife as he walked along. It was made from the stem of a wild apple-tree, of suitable length, which Trigaud had spied in the orchard at Pénissière; he thought it admirably suited to replace the terrible scythe he had shattered at Chêne.

Courte-Joie gave a cry of anger. Evidently he did not share the satisfaction with which his companion flourished the knotty bulk of his new weapon.

"The devil take that animal to the lowest hell!" he cried.

"What's the matter?" asked Jean Oullier, leaving Michel to Bertha's care and hurrying on to join Courte-Joie and Trigaud.

"Matter!" cried Courte-Joie, "the matter is that this brute has put the whole band of the red-breeches on our track! May the plague choke me for not having thought of it before! Ever since we left La Pénissière he has been a regular Tom Thumb; and, unluckily for us, it isn't bread crumbs he has strewn along the way, but the twigs, leaves, bark of his tree. Those scoundrelly soldiers, who, I haven't a doubt, will find

out that we dug among the embers, are by this time at the other end of the trail this animal has provided for them. Ah, double, treble, quadruple, brute!" concluded Courte-Joie, by way of peroration.

Joining action to words he brought down his fist with all his might on the skull of the giant, who seemed no more conscious of the blow than if Courte-Joie had merely passed his hand through his hair.

"Damn it!" said Jean Oullier, "what's to be done now?"

"Give up the farm at Saint-Hilaire, where they'd catch us like mice in a trap."

"But," said Bertha, quickly, "Monsieur Michel cannot possibly go any farther. See how pale he is!"

"Let us bear to the right," said Jean Oullier, "and make for the Bouaimé moor, where we can hide among the rocks. To walk faster and leave fewer tracks, I'll take Monsieur Michel on my shoulders. We'll walk in file, and Trigaud's steps will hide the rest."

The Bouaimé moor, toward which Jean Oullier now guided the little troop, lies about three miles from the village of Saint-Hilaire; the river Maine must be crossed to reach it. It extends on the north as far as Rémouillé and Montbert; the lay of the land is very uneven and it is strewn with granite rocks, some evidently placed there by the hand of man. Druidic stones and dolmens lift their brown heads crowned with moss amid tufts of heather and the yellow flowers of the gorse and broom. It was to one of the most remarkable of these stones that Jean Oullier now guided the little caravan. This stone was flat, and rested on four enormous corner-stones of granite. Ten or a dozen persons could easily have lain in its shadow.

Michel was no sooner there than he gave way entirely, and would have fallen flat on the ground if Bertha had not supported him. She hastened to gather ferns, which she spread beneath the dolmen; and Michel was no sooner laid upon them than, in spite of the gravity of the situation, he fell soundly asleep.

Trigaud was stationed as sentinel on the dolmen; aboriginal statue on an aboriginal pedestal, he called to mind by his mighty outline the giants of two thousand years ago, who raised that altar. Courte-Joie, unstrapped, lay down to rest near Michel, whom Bertha would not leave, in spite of the exhaustion, both moral and physical, which the fatigues of the previous day and night had entailed upon her. Jean Oullier walked away, partly to reconnoitre the situation, and partly to obtain provisions, of which they stood greatly in need.

For about two hours Trigaud's eyes had roved over the broad expanse of the savanna before and around him. Not a sound had reached his ear, attentively listening, except the monotonous hum of bees and wasps pilfering sweetness from the broom and the wild thyme. The mists which the sun was drawing from the earth began to assume to Trigaud's eyes a variety of rainbow tints, the shimmerings of which, added to the rays of the sun, which were now falling plumb on his tufts of red hair, benumbed his brain; various somniferous combinations were about to plunge him into a siesta, not induced, unfortunately for him, by any meal, when the sudden report of a firearm roused him from his torpor.

He looked in the direction of Saint-Hilaire and saw the white vapor produced by the shot. Next, he saw a man running at full speed, apparently making for the dolmen. With one bound Trigaud was off his pedestal. Bertha, who had resisted sleep, heard the shot and immediately waked up Courte-Joie.

Trigaud took the cripple in his arms and hoisted him above his head till he was fully ten feet off the ground, saying but two words, which, however, needed no commentary:--

"Jean Oullier."

Courte-Joie shaded his eyes with his hand and had no difficulty in recognizing the old Vendéan; but he noticed that instead of making direct for the dolmen, Jean Oullier had taken to the opposite hill and was heading for Montbert. He also

observed that instead of running on the slope of the hill, where he might have been sheltered from the eyes of his pursuers, the old huntsman had chosen the most exposed places, keeping in full view of whoever was within three miles of him.

Jean Oullier, he knew, was far too wary to act heedlessly; he must have some good reason for his present behavior; no doubt he was attracting the enemy's attention to himself in order to divert it from the rest of the party. Courte-Joie therefore concluded that the wisest thing for him and his companions to do was to stay in their present shelter and await events, carefully watching, meantime, all that happened.

Whenever intelligence was needed instead of senses, Courte-Joie no longer trusted to Trigaud. He had himself hoisted to the top of the dolmen, although, small as his truncated body was, he thought best not to display it too openly on that pedestal. He therefore lay down flat on his stomach with his face turned in the direction of the hill up which Jean Oullier was proceeding.

Soon, at the very place whence the Vendéan had issued, he saw a soldier, then another, then a third; he counted them up to twenty. They did not seem eager to measure speed with their game; they simply spread over the moor to cut off his retreat in case he attempted to return. These equivocal tactics increased Courte-Joie's watchfulness; for they led him to think that the soldiers had some other object in view than the mere pursuit of the Vendéan. The hill which the latter was mounting ended, about half a mile from the point where Jean Oullier then was, in a sharp point of rocks, at the foot of which was a bog. It was on that spot, no doubt because Jean Oullier was aiming for it, that Courte-Joie's attention was now fixed.

"Hum!" said Trigaud, suddenly.

"What is it?" asked Courte-Joie.

"Red-breeches," replied the other, pointing to the bog.

Courte-Joie followed the direction of Trigaud's finger and saw the barrel of a gun in the midst of the reeds; then a form. It was that of a soldier, and he, like the one first

seen on the heath, was followed by twenty others. Courte-Joie saw them crouching among the reeds like sportsmen on the watch. Their game was Jean Oullier. If he descended by the point of rocks, as he was evidently about to do, he must fall into the ambush.

There was not a moment to be lost in warning him. Courte-Joie did not hesitate; he seized his gun and fired it, taking care to hold the muzzle below the bushes and to fire behind the dolmen. Then he looked hastily back to the scene of action.

Jean Oullier had heard the signal and knew the ring of Courte-Joie's little gun; he was not mistaken for a moment as to the reasons that constrained his friend to abandon the concealment he was preserving for them at such cost to himself. Instantly he made a half turn, and instead of continuing his way to the steep descent and the bog, he rapidly descended the hill he had been climbing. He no longer ran, he flew; no doubt some plan had occurred to him, and he was hurrying to put it into execution. At the rate he was coming down he would join his friends in a few moments.

But in spite of Courte-Joie's precautions to conceal the smoke of his shot, the soldiers had seen the direction from which it came, and those on the moor as well as those in the bog joined forces behind Jean Oullier (who was still coming down at a great pace), and seemed to be consulting together while awaiting orders.

Courte-Joie glanced about him, apparently studying each point of the horizon; he wet a finger and lifted it to discover the direction of the wind, and felt the heather anxiously, to be sure that the sun, which was hot, and the wind, which was keen, had dried it thoroughly.

"What are you doing?" asked Bertha, who had watched the different phases of this prologue, fully aware of the imminence of the danger, and was now helping Michel, who seemed more depressed than suffering, to get on his feet.

"What am I doing,--or rather what am I going to do, my dear young lady?" replied

the cripple. "I am going to make a glorious bonfire; and you can boast to-night, if the fire saves you, as I hope it will, that you never saw the like before."

So saying, he gave Trigaud several lighted bits of tinder, which the latter stuck into bundles of dried herbage, which he placed at intervals of ten feet among the heather, blowing each of them into a flame with his powerful lungs. He was placing his last bundle as Jean Oullier came up the slope, which led to the dolmen.

"Up! up!" cried the latter. "I am not ten minutes in advance of them."

"Yes, but this will give us twenty," said Courte-Joie pointing to the twigs of heather which were beginning to curl and crackle with the flames, while a dozen or more spiral lines of smoke were rising in the air.

"That fire won't burn fast enough or hot enough to stop them," said Jean Oullier. "Besides," he added, after studying the condition of the atmosphere, "the wind will send the flame in the direction that we must take."

"Yes; but flame, gars Oullier, carries smoke," said Courte-Joie, triumphantly; "and that's what I'm counting on. The smoke will hide how few we are and where we are going."

"Ah! Courte-Joie, Courte-Joie," muttered Oullier between his teeth, "if you had your legs what a poacher you'd be!"

Then, without saying another word, he picked Michel up and put him on his shoulders (in spite of the young man's assurance that he could walk well enough, and did not wish to cause that additional fatigue to the old Vendéan), and followed Trigaud, who had already started with his rider on his back.

"Take mademoiselle's hand!" called Courte-Joie to Jean Oullier; "and tell her to shut her mouth and take in a long breath; in ten minutes we sha'n't be able to see or breathe."

In fact the ten minutes had not expired before the ten columns of smoke were

blended into one and formed a dense sheet stretching to right and left five hundred feet, while the flames roared sullenly behind them.

"Can you see sufficiently to guide us?" said Jean Oullier to Courte-Joie; "for the most important thing of all is not to go astray, and next, not to get separated."

"We have no other guide than the smoke," replied Courte-Joie. "Let us follow that boldly and it will take us where we want to go; but don't lose sight of Trigaud as head of the column."

Jean Oullier was one of those men who know the value of words and time; he therefore contented himself with saying:--

"Forward, march!" giving the example and seeming no more hindered by Michel's weight than Trigaud was by Courte-Joie's.

They walked thus for fifteen minutes without getting out of the smoke which their conflagration, spreading with amazing rapidity under the force of the wind, rolled up about them. Once or twice Jean Oullier muttered to Bertha, who was half suffocated:--

"Can you breathe?"

To which she replied with an almost inarticulate yes. As for Michel, the old keeper cared not at all; he was certain to keep up with the rest, inasmuch as he, Jean Oullier, had him on his shoulders.

Suddenly Trigaud, who marched at their head guided by Courte-Joie, and utterly indifferent to where he went, stepped back abruptly. He had set his feet in water, which the smoke had prevented him from seeing, and he was now knee-deep in it. Aubin uttered a cry of joy.

"We've done it!" he said; "the smoke has led us as straight as the best-broken hound ever led a sportsman."

"Ah!" exclaimed Jean Oullier.

"You understand now, don't you, my gars?" said Courte-Joie, in a tone of triumph.

"Yes; but how shall we reach the island?"

"How? Why, there's Trigaud."

"True; but when the soldiers miss us won't they suspect the trick?"

"Of course, if they do miss us; but I intend they sha'n't."

"Go on."

"They don't know how many we are. We will put Mademoiselle Bertha and the wounded man in safety, and then, as if we had made a mistake and found our way blocked by the pond, you and I and Trigaud will land, and show them by a few shots where we are. After that, being free of incumbrance, we can easily get into the woods of Gineston, and return to the island after dark."

"But these poor children will be left without food!"

"Pooh!" said Courte-Joie, "it won't kill them to go twenty-four hours without eating."

"So be it." Then, with a sort of sad contempt for his want of intelligence, "Last night," he continued, "must have addled my brain, or I should have thought of all this myself."

"Don't expose yourselves uselessly," said Bertha, half joyous at the thought of the tête-à-tête which these strange circumstances were giving her with the man she loved.

"Don't trouble about that," replied Jean Oullier.

Trigaud took Michel in his arms, without unhorsing Courte-Joie (which would have made him lose time) and entered the pond. He walked thus till the water was up to his middle; then he hoisted Michel to his head in case the water mounted higher. It stopped, however, at the level of the giant's breast. He crossed the pond to a sort of island about twelve feet square, which seemed in the midst of that stagnant water to

be nothing more than a vast duck's-nest. It was covered with a forest of reeds.

Trigaud deposited Michel among the reeds and returned for Bertha, whom he carried in the same manner and put down, as he might a bird, beside the young Baron de la Logerie.

"Lie down flat among the reeds in the middle of the island!" called Jean Oullier from the shore. "Lift the reeds you have just bent down, and I can promise that no one will find you!"

"Very good," replied Bertha; "and now, my friends, think only of yourselves."

XX.

THE FIRM OF AUBIN COURTE-JOIE AND CO. DOES HONOR TO ITS PARTNERSHIP.

It was high time for the three Chouans to finish what they had to do on the borders of the pond. The flames were rolling onward with terrifying rapidity; they ran along the flowery tops of the broom and heather like gold and purple birds swept forward by the wind, as if they preferred to play among the twigs and branches before they seized upon the stems. Their mutterings, like the roar of ocean, increased in all directions round the fugitives, and the smoke grew denser and more suffocating.

But the steel muscles possessed by Jean Oullier and Trigaud were a match for the flames, and the trio were soon safe from all danger of fire. They turned obliquely to the left, and soon reached a dip in the valley which was almost free of the smoke which so far had been their main protection,--serving to hide their number, the direction of their flight, and the man[oe]uvre by which Michel and Bertha were now in a place of safety.

"Let us crawl; we must crawl now, Trigaud," cried Jean Oullier. "The soldiers mustn't see us till we know where they are and what they are doing."

The giant bent down as though he were going on all fours; and it was lucky for him

he did so, for no sooner had he stooped than a ball, which he would otherwise have received in his breast, whizzed harmlessly through the air.

"The devil!" cried Courte-Joie; "you didn't give that advice a bit too soon, gars Oullier."

"They have guessed our trick and have surrounded us--on this side at least," said Jean Oullier.

They now saw a file of soldiers posted at a hundred paces from each other, all the way from the dolmen to a distance of a mile and a half, evidently waiting, like huntsmen, till the quarry should reappear.

"Shall we rush upon them?"

"That's my advice; but wait till I have made a gap."

Putting his gun to his shoulder (but without leaving his horizontal position) Jean Oullier fired on the soldier who was now reloading his gun. The man, struck in the breast, twirled round upon himself and fell head foremost to the ground.

"That's one!" said Jean Oullier.

Then aiming at the next soldier as calmly as he would at a partridge, he fired. The second man fell like the first.

"A double-shot!" exclaimed Courte-Joie. "Bravo, gars Oullier, bravo!"

"Forward! forward!" cried Oullier, springing to his feet with the agility of a panther. "Forward! and spread a little to give less chance for the balls they'll rain upon us!"

The Vendéan was right. The three comrades had scarcely advanced ten steps before six or eight successive discharges were heard; and one of the balls splintered the club which Trigaud was carrying in his hand. Happily for the fugitives, the soldiers hurrying on all sides to the help of their wounded companions, and coming up out of breath, had fired unsteadily. Nevertheless they closed the way and it is probable that Jean Oullier and his friends would not have had time to escape through their line

without a hand-to-hand fight.

As it was, just as Jean Oullier, who held the left, was about to spring across a little ravine, a shako rose on the other side, and he saw a soldier awaiting him with fixed bayonet. The rapidity of his rush prevented the Vendéan from reloading his gun, but he calculated that as his adversary contented himself with his bayonet he was probably in the same condition as himself. Risking all, he drew his knife, put it between his teeth, and continued his way with headlong speed. On the edge of the ravine he stopped short, and putting up his gun took aim at his adversary. The soldier, thinking the Vendéan's gun was loaded, flung himself flat on his stomach to escape the shot. An instant after, and as if the pause he made had not diminished the impulsion of his spring, Jean was across the ravine, over the body of the soldier, and away like lightning on the other side.

Trigaud was equally fortunate; and save for a ball which grazed his shoulder and added more rags to those he wore, he and his partner Courte-Joie got safely across the line. The two fugitives (Trigaud and Courte-Joie count as one) now turned diagonally, one to right, the other to left, so as to meet at the point of the angle. At the end of five minutes they were within speaking distance.

"Are you all right?" said Jean Oullier to Courte-Joie.

"All right!" answered the cripple; "and in twenty minutes, if we don't have a limb lopped off by those rascally Blues, we'll be in the fields; and once we are behind a hedge the devil himself can't touch us. That was a bad idea of ours, taking to the moor, gars Oullier."

"Pooh! we'll soon be away from it; and the young folks are much safer where they are than if we had put them in the thickest forest. You are not wounded?"

"No; and you, Trigaud? I thought I felt a sort of shudder on your hide."

The giant showed the gash the ball had made in his club; evidently, this misfortune, which destroyed the symmetry of the work at which he had fondly labored all the

morning, troubled him far more than the damage done to his clothing or to his deltoid, which was slightly injured by the passage of the ball.

"Oh, be joyful!" cried Courte-Joie; "here are the fields."

In truth, not a thousand steps away from the fugitives, at the bottom of a slope which was so gentle as to be almost imperceptible, fields of wheat were visible, their ears already yellowing and swaying to the breeze in their dull-green sheaths.

"Suppose we stop to breathe a minute," said Courte-Joie, who seemed to feel the fatigue that Trigaud felt.

"Yes," said Jean Oullier, "and give me time to reload. Meantime, do you look about."

Jean Oullier reloaded his gun, and Courte-Joie turned his eyes in a circle around him.

"Oh, ten million thunders!" exclaimed the cripple suddenly, just as the Vendéan was ramming in his second ball.

"What now?" said Jean Oullier, turning round.

"Forward! all the devils of hell! forward! I don't see anything yet, but I hear something that bodes no good."

"Whew! they are doing us the honor of cavalry, gars Courte-Joie. Quick, quick, lazy-bones!" he added, addressing Trigaud.

The latter, as much to relieve his lungs as to make answer to Jean Oullier, gave vent to a sort of bellow which a lusty Poitevin bull might have envied him, and then with a single stride he jumped an enormous stone which lay on his way; as he did so a cry of pain burst from Jean Oullier.

"What's the matter?" asked Courte-Joie, looking back to the latter, who had stopped and was leaning on his gun with his foot raised.

"Nothing, nothing," replied Oullier; "don't trouble about me."

He tried to walk, gave another cry, and sat down.

"Oh," said Courte-Joie, "we shall not go on without you. Tell me, what's the matter?"

"Nothing, I say."

"Are you wounded?"

"Oh, for that bone-setter of Montbert!" exclaimed Jean Oullier.

"What's that?" said Courte-Joie, who did not catch his meaning.

"I've either broken or turned my ankle by stepping into a hole; at any rate, I can't take another step."

"Trigaud will take you on one shoulder and me on the other."

"Impossible! you could never reach the hedges."

"But if we leave you behind they'll kill you, my Jean."

"Maybe so," said the Vendéan, "but I'll kill a few of them before I die; and by way of a beginning, look at that fellow."

A young officer of chasseurs, better mounted than the rest, appeared at the top of a rise about three hundred paces from the fugitives. Jean put his musket to his shoulder and fired. The young man threw up his arms and fell from his saddle. Jean Oullier reloaded his gun.

"Can't you walk at all?" asked Courte-Joie.

"I might limp a dozen steps; but what's the good of that?"

"Then here we'll stay, Trigaud."

"You won't do such a foolish thing, I hope?" cried Jean Oullier.

"Yes, by my faith, I will. Where you die we die, old friend; but, as you say, we'll bring down a few of them first."

"No, no, Courte-Joie; that sha'n't be so. You must live to look after those young ones

we left over there--What are you about, Trigaud?" he suddenly asked, looking at the giant, who had gone down into a ravine and was lifting a block of granite.

"Don't scold him!" said Courte-Joie; "he isn't wasting time."

"Here, here!" cried Trigaud, showing a hollow made by the flow of water under the stone.

"Faith, he's right. I declare if he hasn't the mind of a monkey this day, my gars Trigaud! Here, Jean Oullier, here, get under! get under!"

Jean Oullier dragged himself to the stone and rolled into the excavation, where he curled himself into a ball with the water to his middle. Trigaud then replaced the stone, leaving just enough space to give air and light to the living being it covered like a tombstone.

The giant had just concluded this work when the horsemen appeared at the top of the slope; and after convincing themselves that the young officer was really dead, dashed down in pursuit of the Chouans at full gallop.

Nevertheless, all hope was not lost. Trigaud and Courte-Joie were scarcely fifty steps from a hedge beyond which they would be safe from horsemen; and as for the foot-soldiers, they appeared to have relinquished their pursuit.

But a subaltern officer admirably mounted pressed them so hard that Courte-Joie felt the hot breath of the animal on his legs. The rider, determined to end the matter, rose in his stirrups and aimed such a blow with his sabre at the cripple's head that he would certainly have split it in two; but the horse, which he did not have well in hand, swerved to the left, while Trigaud instinctively flung himself to the right. The weapon therefore missed its mark and merely made a flesh wound on the cripple's arm.

"Face about!" cried Courte-Joie to Trigaud, as though he were commanding a company. The latter pivoted round, absolutely as though his body were riveted to the ground with an iron screw.

The horse, passing beside him, struck him in the breast, but did not shake him. At the same instant Courte-Joie, firing one barrel of his little gun, knocked over the subaltern, who was dragged to some distance by the impetus of his horse.

"One!" counted Trigaud, in whom the imminence of danger seemed to develop a loquacity which was not habitual with him.

During the moment that this affair lasted the other horsemen were rapidly approaching; a few horse's-lengths alone separated them from the two Vendéans, who could hear, above the tramp of their galloping steeds, the sharp cocking of their pistols and musketoons. But that moment had sufficed Courte-Joie to judge of the resources offered him by the place in which he found himself.

They were now at the farther end of the moor of Bouaimé, a few steps from a crossway whence several roads diverged. Like all such open spaces in Brittany and La Vendée, this crossway had its crucifix; and the cross, which was of stone, and dilapidated on one side, offered a temporary refuge which might soon become untenable. To right were the first hedges of the fields; but there was no chance whatever of reaching them, for three or four horsemen, forestalling their intention, had obliquely advanced to thwart it. Opposite to them and flowing to their left was the river Maine, which made a bend at this place; but Courte-Joie knew it was useless to even think of putting the river between himself and the soldiers, for the opposite bank was a face of rock rising from the water; and in following the current to find a spot to land, the two Chouans would have been simply a target for the enemy.

It was, therefore, the refuge of the cross on which Courte-Joie decided, and in that direction Trigaud, under his master's orders, proceeded. But just as he reached the column of stone and turned it to put its bulk between the soldiers and themselves, a ball struck an arm of the cross, ricochetted, and wounded Courte-Joie in the cheek,--not, however, preventing the cripple from replying to it in turn.

Unfortunately, the blood which poured from the wound fell on Trigaud's hands. He saw that blood, gave a roar of fury,--as though he felt nought but that which injured his companion,--and charged madly on the soldiers like a wild-boar on its hunters.

In an instant Courte-Joie and Trigaud were surrounded; a dozen sabres whirled above their heads, a dozen pistol muzzles threatened their bodies, and one gendarme seized Courte-Joie. But Trigaud's club descended; it fell upon the leg of the gendarme and crushed it; the hapless rider uttered a terrible cry and fell from his horse, which fled across the moor.

At the same instant a dozen shots were fired; Trigaud had a ball in the breast, and Courte-Joie's right arm, broken in two places, hung helpless at his side. The giant seemed insensible to pain; with his trunk of a tree he made a moulinet which broke two or three sabres and warded others.

"To the cross! to the cross!" cried Courte-Joie. "It is well to die there."

"Yes," muttered Trigaud; hearing his master speak of dying he brought down his club convulsively on the head of a horseman, who fell like a log. Then, executing the order he had received, he walked backward to the cross--to cover as much as possible the body of his friend with his own body.

"A thousand thunders!" shouted a corporal; "we are wasting time and lives and powder on those beggars."

So saying, he spurred his horse and forced it with one bound upon the two Vendéans. The horse's head struck Trigaud full in the chest, and the shock was so violent that it brought the giant to his knees. The soldier profited by the chance to strike Courte-Joie a blow which entered his skull.

"Throw me at the foot of the cross and escape if you can!" said Courte-Joie, in a failing voice. "It is all over with me." Then he began the prayer: "Receive my soul, God!"

But the colossus no longer obeyed him; maddened with blood and fury he uttered

hoarse, inarticulate cries, like those of a lion at bay; his eyes, usually dull and lifeless, cast out flames; his lips drew up, exposing the clenched and savage teeth ready to render eraunch for eraunch with a tiger. The gallop of the horse had carried the soldier who wounded Courte-Joie to some distance. Trigaud could not reach him; but he measured the space with his eye, and whirling the club above his head, he flung it hissing through the air as if from a catapult.

The rider forced his horse to rear, and so avoided the blow; but the horse received it on his head. The creature beat the air with his forefeet as he fell over backward, and rolled with his rider on the ground.

Trigaud uttered a cry of joy more terrible and horrible than a cry of pain; the rider's leg was caught beneath the animal. He flung himself upon him, parried with his arm, which was deeply gashed, a sabre-cut; seized the soldier by the leg; dragged him from the body of the horse; and then, twirling him in the air, as a child does a sling, he dashed out his brains upon an arm of the cross.

The byzantine stone shook to its base, and remained bent over to one side, and covered with blood. A cry of horror and of vengeance burst from the troops, but this specimen of the giant's strength deterred the soldiers from approaching him; they stopped where they were, to reload their guns.

During this time Courte-Joie breathed his last, saying, in a load voice:--

"Amen!"

Then Trigaud, feeling his beloved master dead, and utterly ignoring the preparations the chasseurs were making to kill him,--Trigaud sat down at the foot of the cross, unfastened the body of Courte-Joie from his shoulders and laid it on his knees, as a mother might handle the body of her child; he gazed on the livid face, wiping with his sleeve the blood that blurred it, while a torrent of tears--the first that being, indifferent to all the miseries of life, had ever shed--flowed thick and fast from his eyes, mingling with the blood he was piously and absorbedly removing.

A violent explosion, two new wounds, and the dull thud produced by three or four balls striking the body which Trigaud was holding in his arms and pressing to his breast, roused him from his grief and his insensibility, he rose to his full height; and this movement, which made the soldiers think he meant to spring upon them, caused them to gather up the reins of their horses, while a visible shudder ran through their ranks.

But Trigaud never looked at them; he thought of them no longer; he was seeking a means of not being parted from his friend by death; was he searching for a spot which promised him a union throughout eternity?

He walked toward the river. In spite of his wounds, in spite of the blood which flowed down his body from the holes of several pistol-balls and left a rivulet of blood behind him, Trigaud walked firm and erect. He reached the river-bank before a single soldier thought of preventing him; there he stopped at a point overlooking a black pool of water, the stillness of which proclaimed its depth. Clasping the body of the cripple still tighter to his breast, and gathering up his last remaining strength, he sprang forward into its depths without uttering a word.

The water dashed noisily above the mighty mass it now engulfed, boiling and foaming long over the place where Trigaud and his friend had disappeared; then it subsided into rings, which widened, widened ever till they died upon the shore.

The soldiers had ridden up. They thought the beggar had thrown himself into the water to reach the other bank, and pistol in hand they held themselves ready to fire the moment he came to the surface of the stream.

But Trigaud never reappeared; his soul had gone to join the soul of the only being he had loved in this world, and their bodies lay softly together on a bed of reeds in a pool of the river Maine.

XXI.

IN WHICH SUCCOR COMES FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER.

During the week which had just elapsed Maître Courtin kept prudently quiet and out of sight in his farmhouse at La Logerie. Like all diplomatists, Courtin had no great fancy for war; he calculated, very justly, that the period of pistol-shots and sabre-cuts must soon pass by, and he wished to be fresh and lively for the succeeding period, when he might be useful to the cause--and to himself--according to the petty means which Nature allotted to him.

He was not without some uneasiness, the cautious farmer, as to the consequences which might result to him from the part he had taken in the arrest of Jean Oullier and the death of Bonneville; and at this moment when hatred, rancor, vengeance of all kinds had put the country under arms, he thought it wisest not to foolishly risk his person within their range. He was even afraid of meeting his young master, Baron Michel (inoffensive as he knew him to be), ever since a certain night when he had cut the girths of the baron's saddle.

In fact, the day after that performance, thinking that the best way to escape being killed was to seem half dead, he took to his bed and gave out, by his servant-woman, to his neighbors and administrators that a malignant fever like that of poor old Tinguy had brought him to death's door.

Madame de la Logerie, in her distress at Michel's flight, had sent twice for her farmer; but danger paralyzed Courtin's desire to please her, and the proud baroness, goaded by anxiety, was forced to go herself to the peasant's house.

She had heard that Michel was a prisoner, and was about to start for Nantes to use all her influence with the authorities to get him released, and all her authority as a mother to take him far away from this disastrous neighborhood. Under no circumstances would she return to La Logerie, where further sojourn seemed to her dangerous by reason of the conflict about to take place; and she was anxious to see Courtin and leave him in charge of the château and her interests.

Courtin promised to be worthy of her confidence, but in so weak and dolorous a voice that the baroness left the farmhouse with a heart full of pity for the poor devil, even in the midst of her own personal anxieties.

After this came the fights at Chêne and La Pénissière. On the days of their occurrence the noise of the musketry, as it reached the farmer's ears, caused a relapse in his illness. But no sooner had he heard of the result of those fights than he rose from his bed entirely cured. The next day he felt so vigorous that, in spite of his woman's remonstrance, he determined to go to Montaigu, his market-town, and get the orders of the sub-prefect as to his future course. The vulture smelt the carnage, and wanted to be sure of his little share of the spoil.

At Montaigu Maître Courtin learned that his trip was useless; the department had just been placed under military authority. The sub-prefect advised the mayor of La Logerie to go to Aigrefeuille and get his instructions from the general, who was there at that moment.

Dermoncourt, fully occupied with the movement of his columns, and having, as a brave and loyal soldier, little liking for men of Courtin's character, received the latter's denunciations, made under the guise of necessary information, with an abstracted air, and, in fact, showed a coldness to the mayor of La Logerie which greatly chilled that functionary's hopes. Nevertheless the general accepted a proposal which Courtin made him, to put a garrison in the château de la Logerie; for the position seemed to him an excellent one from which to hold the whole region in hand, from Machecoul to Saint Colombin.

Heaven owed the farmer some compensation for the general's want of sympathy, and, with its usual justice, soon bestowed it.

As he left the house which served as headquarters, Maître Courtin was approached by a man whom he had no recollection of ever having met, but who, nevertheless, showed him the utmost civility and a friendliness that was altogether touching. This

individual was a man about thirty years of age, dressed in black clothes, the cut of which resembled that of priestly garments worn in a city. His forehead was low, his nose hooked like the beak of a bird of prey. His lips were thin; and yet, in spite of their thinness, they were prominent, owing to a peculiar formation of the jaw; his pointed chin protruded at an angle which was more than sharp; his hair, of a leaden black, was plastered along his temples, and his gray eyes, often dropped, seemed to see through his winking eyelids. It was the countenance of a Jesuit grafted on the face of a Jew.

A few words said by this unknown man to Courtin appeared to remove the distrust with which the latter was inclined to receive advances which seemed to him at first suspicious. He even accepted with a good grace an invitation to dinner at the hôtel Saint-Pierre, which the stranger gave him; and after two hours passed tête-à-tête in a private room, where the individual we have described ordered the table to be laid, such mutual sympathy had been developed that they treated each other, Courtin and he, as old friends; exchanging, when they parted, many shakings of the hand, while the mayor of La Logerie, as he struck his spurs into his pony's flanks, promised his new acquaintance that he should not be long without hearing from him.

Toward nine o'clock that evening Maître Courtin was jogging along, with the tail of his beast toward Aigrefeuille and its nose toward La Logerie; he seemed quite lively and joyous, and was flirting his whip by its leather handle right and left on the flanks of his little steed, with a jollity and ease that were not characteristic of him.

Maître Courtin's brain was evidently larded with couleur-de-rose ideas. He was thinking how on the morrow he should have, at a stone's throw from his farm, a detachment of fifty soldiers, whose presence would relieve him of anxiety, not only about the consequences of what he had done, but also about those of certain things that he wanted to do; he was thinking, too, that in his capacity as mayor he could use those fifty bayonets according to the needs of his private animosities. This idea

gratified his self-love and his hatred together.

But, seductive as this idea of a Pretorian guard which could, if cleverly managed, be turned into his private guard, might be, it was surely not sufficient to give Maître Courtin--a practical man if ever there was one--his present exuberant satisfaction.

The mysterious unknown had no doubt dazzled his eyes with something more than the glitter of an ephemeral glory,--in fact, it was neither more nor less than piles of gold and silver which Maître Courtin was beholding in his mind's eye through the mists of the future, and toward which he was mechanically stretching out his hand with a smile of covetousness.

Under the control of these agreeable hallucinations, and somewhat hazy from the fumes of wine which his is new friend had poured for him generously, Maître Courtin let himself drop into a state of gentle somnolence; his body swayed to right and left, according to the caprices of his ambling pony, until at last, the quadruped having stumbled over a stone, Maître Courtin pitched forward and remained doubled over on the pommel of his saddle.

The position was uncomfortable, but Maître Courtin was careful not to change it; he was then in the midst of so delightful a dream that, for all the world, he would not lose it by awaking. He thought he was meeting his young master, who said to him, waving his hand over the domain of La Logerie, "All this is thine!"

The gift was proving more considerable than Courtin at first thought it; untold riches were developing. The trees in the orchard were laden down with gold and silver fruit; all the poles in the neighborhood would not suffice to hinder the branches from breaking under the weight of such wealth. The wild-roses and hawthorns were bearing, instead of their usual haws, jewels of all colors, which sparkled in the sun like so many carbuncles; and there was such a quantity of them that, although he knew they were precious stones, Courtin saw, with an eye of equanimity, a small marauder filling his pockets with them.

The farmer entered his own stable. In that stable he beheld a file of fat and well-fed cows extending out of sight so far, so far, that the one which was nearest the door seemed to be of the size of an elephant, while the one in the farthest distance was no bigger than a worm. Under each of these cows was a young girl milking. The first two had the features of the "she-wolves," the daughters of the Marquis de Souday. From the teats of the cows they were milking ran a white and yellow liquid, brilliant as two metals in fusion. As it fell into the copper pails of the two girls it produced that delightful sound which is music to the ear,--the sound of gold and silver coins piling one above the other.

As he looked into the pails the happy farmer saw that they were more than half full of rare and precious coins of various effigies. He stretched out his eager, grasping, quivering hands to seize these treasures, and as he did so a violent shock accompanied by a cry of agony put to flight his soft illusions.

Courtin opened his eyes and saw in the darkness a peasant-woman with torn clothes and dishevelled hair stretching out her hands to him.

"What do you want?" cried Maître Courtin, assuming a gruff voice and raising his stick in a threatening manner.

"Your help, my good man; I implore it in God's name!"

Finding that pity alone was asked for, and certain now that he had only a woman to deal with, Maître Courtin, who at first had looked about him in a terrified manner, was completely reassured.

"You are committing a misdemeanor, my dear," he said. "You have no right to stop persons on the high-road and ask for alms!"

"Alms! who said anything about alms?" returned the woman, in a refined and haughty tone of voice which arrested Courtin's attention. "I want you to help in rescuing an unfortunate man who is dying of fatigue and exposure! I want you to lend me your horse to take him to some farmhouse in the neighborhood."

"Who is it I am to help?"

"You seem by your dress to belong to the country people. I shall therefore not hesitate to tell you the truth, for I am sure, whatever your political opinions may be, you will not betray us,--he is a royalist officer."

The voice of the unknown woman excited Courtin's curiosity to the utmost. He leaned from his saddle striving to see in the darkness the face of her to whom the voice belonged; but he did not succeed in doing so.

"Who are you, yourself?" he asked.

"What is that to you?"

"Do you expect me to lend my horse to persons I don't know?"

"I have made a mistake; your answer proves that I was wrong to treat you as a friend or a generous enemy. I had better have employed another means. Give me your horse at once!"

"Indeed!"

"You have two minutes for decision."

"And if I refuse?"

"I will blow your brains out!" said the woman, pointing a pistol at Courtin and clicking the trigger to let him know the execution of the threat would follow promptly.

"Ah, good! I recognize you now," said Courtin. "You are Mademoiselle de Souday."

Then, without allowing his questioner time to say more, the mayor of La Logerie got off his pony.

"Very good!" said Bertha, for it was she. "Now tell me your name, and to-morrow the horse shall be sent home to you."

"No need, for I'll go with you and help you."

"You! why this sudden change?"

"Because I take it the person you want me to help is the owner of my farm."

"His name?"

"Monsieur Michel de la Logerie."

"Ah! you are one of his tenants. Then we can go to your farmhouse for concealment."

"But," stammered Courtin, who was far from comfortable at the thought of meeting the young baron, especially when he reflected that if he took him with Bertha under his roof Jean Oullier would be certain to come there after them, "you see I am the mayor, and--"

"You are afraid of compromising yourself in serving your master!" exclaimed Bertha, in a tone of the deepest contempt.

"Oh, no, not that! I'd give my blood for the young man; but we are to have a garrison of soldiers in the château de la Logerie."

"So much the better; they will never suspect that Vendéans, insurgents, would take refuge so near them."

"But I think, in the interest of Monsieur le baron, that Jean Oullier could find you a safer retreat than my house, where the soldiers are likely to be, morning, noon, and night."

"Alas! poor Jean Oullier is not likely to help any of his friends in future."

"How so?"

"We heard this morning some brisk firing in the direction of the moor; we did not stir from where we were, as he told us to wait till he returned. But we waited, and waited, in vain! Jean Oullier is either dead or a prisoner, for he is not one of those who desert their friends."

If it had been daylight Courtin could not have concealed the joy this news, which

relieved him of his worst anxieties, caused him. But, though he was not master of his countenance, he was of his words; and he answered Bertha, who had spoken in an agitated voice full of feeling, with a mournful ejaculation which rather reconciled her to him.

"Let us walk faster," said Bertha.

"I'm willing. What a smell of burning there is here!"

"Yes, they set fire to the heath."

"Ah! How came Monsieur le baron to escape the fire? He is in the direction of it."

"Jean Oullier put us among the reeds in the Fréneuse pond."

"Ah! that's why when I touched you just now I felt you were all wet?"

"Yes; as Jean Oullier did not return I crossed the pond to seek for help. Finding no one, I took Baron Michel on my shoulders and brought him ashore. I hoped to carry him to the nearest house, but I have not the strength. I have been obliged to leave him among the bushes and come to the high-road myself. We have had nothing to eat for twenty-four hours."

"Ha! you're a stalwart girl!" cried Courtin, who, in the uncertainty he felt as to how his young master might receive him, was not sorry to conciliate Mademoiselle Bertha's good-will. "You are just the helpmate Monsieur le baron needs in these stirring times."

"It is my duty to give my life for him," said Bertha.

"Yes," said Courtin, emphatically; "and that duty no one, I swear to God, understands as you do. But be calm and don't walk so fast!"

"But he suffers! he may be calling for me--if he comes out of his swoon."

"Did he swoon?" cried Courtin, eagerly, seeing in that small detail the chance of escaping an immediate explanation.

"Yes, poor fellow! he is badly wounded, too."

"Good God!"

"Just think! for twenty-four hours, in his state, he has had no proper care! for my help has been powerless, I may say."

"Good heavens!"

"And think, too! he has been all day in the burning sun in the middle of the reeds; and to-night, in spite of my precautions, the fog has wet him through and through, and he has had a chill.

"Good Lord!"

"Ah! if evil happens to him I'll expiate my fault in penance all my life for having urged him into dangers for which he was unfit!" cried Bertha, whose political sentiments vanished before the loving anguish Michel's sufferings caused her.

As for Courtin, Bertha's assurance that Michel was not in a state to talk to him seemed to double the length of his legs. The girl no longer needed to hasten him on; he walked at his top speed, with a vigor he seldom showed, pulling the pony after him by the bridle, the beast being recalcitrant over the rough and heated road.

Believed for ever and aye of Jean Oullier, Courtin believed it would be easy to excuse himself to his young master,--in fact, that the matter would settle itself.

They soon reached the spot where the girl had left Michel. He, with his back against a stone, his head dropped on his breast, was, if not actually unconscious, in such a state of utter prostration that he had only a dim and confused sense of what was passing about him. He paid no heed to Courtin; and when the latter, with Bertha's help, hoisted him on the pony, he pressed Courtin's hand, as he did that of Bertha, without knowing what he was about.

Courtin and Bertha walked on either side of the pony to support Michel, who, without their help, would have fallen to left or right.

They reached the farmhouse. Courtin woke up his servant-woman, on whom he

knew he could rely, took his own mattress (the only one the house afforded) into a sort of lean-to above his bedroom, where he installed his young master with such zeal, self-devotion, and eager protestations that Bertha ended by regretting the opinion she had formed of him on the high-road.

When Michel's wound was dressed, and he was safely in the bed improvised for him, Bertha went to the servant's room to seek her rest.

Left alone, Maître Courtin rubbed his hands; he had done a good night's work. Violent behavior had not answered hitherto; gentleness, he was sure, was more likely to succeed. He had done better than enter the enemy's camp--he had brought the enemy's camp into his own house, which gave him every likelihood of detecting the secrets of the Whites, especially those concerning Petit-Pierre.

He went over in his brain all the injunctions given to him by the mysterious man at Aigrefeuille; the most important of which was to send him immediate information if he contrived to discover the retreat of the heroine of La Vendée, and not to communicate any facts to the generals,--men who cared nothing for the art of diplomacy, and were altogether below the level of great political machinations.

Courtin now thought it possible, through Michel and Bertha, to discover Madame's retreat; he began to believe that dreams were not always lies, and that, thanks to the two young people, the wells of gold and silver and precious stones, the streams of metallic milk, would become to him a reality.

XXII.

ON THE HIGHWAY.

During all this time Mary had no news of Bertha. Since the evening on which the latter left the Jacquet mill, announcing her resolve to search for Michel, Mary knew nothing of Bertha's movements. Her mind was lost in conjecture. Had Michel spoken? Had Bertha, reduced to despair, done some fatal deed? Was he wounded?

Was he killed? Had Bertha herself been shot in one of her adventurous undertakings? Such were the gloomy alternatives Mary feared for the two objects of her affections; both left her a prey to the keenest anxiety, the sharpest anguish.

In vain she told herself that the wandering life she now led with Petit-Pierre, forced each evening to leave the shelter of the night before, made it very difficult for Bertha to recover their traces. Making all such allowances it seemed to Mary that, unless some misfortune had happened to her, Bertha would surely have sent some news of her whereabouts through the channels of communication which the royalists possessed among the peasantry. Mary's courage was already weakened by the many shocks she had just endured; and she herself, unsupported, isolated, deprived of her lover's presence, which had secretly sustained her in the hour of struggle, now gave way to gloomy distress, and broke down utterly under her trouble. She spent her days, which she ought to have employed in resting after the fatigues of the night, in watching for Bertha or for some messenger who never came; for hours at a time she sat silently absorbed in her grief, speaking only when spoken to.

Mary certainly loved her sister; the immense sacrifice to which she had resigned herself for Bertha's sake abundantly proved it--and yet she blushed, owning to herself, honestly, that it was not Bertha's fate that chiefly filled her mind. However warm, however sincere was the affection Mary felt for her sister, another and more imperious emotion had glided into her soul, and fed on the pain it brought there. In spite of all the poor girl's efforts, the sacrifice of which we speak had never detached her from him who was the occasion of it. Now that Michel was separated from her, she fancied she could indulge without danger the thoughts she had struggled to put away from her; and little by little Michel's image had so gained possession of her heart that it no longer left it, even for a moment.

In the midst of the sufferings of her life, the pain these remembrances of her lover gave her seemed comforting; she flung herself into it with a sort of passion. Day by

day he had an ever-increasing share in the tears and anxiety caused by the strange and long-protracted absence of her sister. After yielding, without reserve, to her despair, after exhausting every gloomy supposition, after evoking all the cruel alternatives of the uncertainty in which each passing hour left her, after anxiously counting all the minutes of those hours, little by little Mary fell into regret,--regret intermingled with self-reproach.

She went over in her memory the smallest incidents of her relation and that of her sister with Michel. She asked herself whether she were not doing wrong in breaking the heart of the poor lad while she broke her own; whether she had the right to force the disposal of his love; whether she were not responsible for the misery into which she was plunging Michel by compelling him to be a sharer in the immense sacrifice she was offering to her sister. Her thoughts returned, with irresistible inclination, to the night spent on the islet of Jonchère. She saw once more those reedy barriers; she fancied she heard that softly harmonious voice, which said: "I love thee!" She closed her eyes, and again she felt the young man's breath as it touched her hair, and his lips laying on her lips the first, the only, but ah! the ineffable kiss she had received from him.

Then the renunciation which her virtue, her tenderness for her sister urged upon her seemed greater than her strength could bear. She blamed herself for rashly attempting a superhuman task, and Love regained so vigorously a heart all love, that Mary,--ordinarily pious, submissive, accustomed to seek, in view of a future life, the path of patient courage,--Mary had no longer the strength to look to heaven only; she was crushed. In the anguish of her passion she gave herself up to impious despair, asking God if this fleeting memory of the touch of those lips was all she was to know of the happiness of being loved; and whether life were worth the pain of living thus disinherited of joy.

The Marquis de Souday at last perceived the great alteration produced on Mary's

face by these grievous emotions; but he naturally attributed it to the great bodily fatigue the young girl was now enduring. He was himself much depressed in seeing all his fine dreams vanishing, and all the predictions made to him by the general realized. He saw with dread a return of his exiled days without even having seen, as it were, the dawn of a struggle. Still, he felt it his duty to force his courage and resolution to the level of the misfortune which overwhelmed him, and that duty the marquis would have died rather than not fulfil; for was it not a soldier's duty? Little as he cared for social duties and proprieties, the more he stickled for those which concerned his military honor. Therefore, notwithstanding his inward depression, he showed no outward sign of it, and even found in the vicissitudes of their adventurous life the text of many a joke with which he tried to distract the minds of his companions from the anxiety and disappointment consequent on the failure of the insurrection.

Mary had told her father of Bertha's departure; and the worthy old gentleman had intelligently guessed that the girl's anxiety about the conduct and fate of her betrothed was at the bottom of it. As eye-witnesses had already brought him word that Michel, far from failing in his duty, had heroically contributed to, the defence of La Pénissière, the marquis,--who supposed that Jean Oullier, on whose care and prudence he implicitly relied, was with his daughter and future son-in-law,--the marquis did not think it necessary to be more uneasy at Bertha's absence than a general might have been about an officer dispatched on an expedition. Nevertheless, the marquis could not explain to himself why Baron Michel had preferred to fight so well under Jean Oullier's orders rather than under his own,--and he was inclined to be annoyed at the preference.

Surrounded by Legitimist leaders, Petit-Pierre, on the very evening of the fight at Chêne, left the Jacquet mill, where the danger of a surprise was imminent. The main-road, which was not far distant, was covered at intervals by bodies of soldiers escorting prisoners. Petit-Pierre and her bodyguard started, therefore, as soon as it

was dark.

Wishing to follow the highway as much as possible, the little troop encountered a detachment of the government troops, and was forced to crouch in a wayside ditch, which was filled with brambles, for over an hour, while the detachment filed by. The whole region was so patrolled by these movable columns that it was only by following the most impassable wood-paths that the fugitives could be sure of escaping their vigilance.

Petit-Pierre's uneasiness was extreme; her physical appearance betrayed her mental sufferings, but her words, her behavior, never! In the midst of this hazardous life, so disturbed and often so gloomy, the same bright gayety sparkled from her, and held its own with that the marquis was assuming. Pursued as they were, the fugitives never had a full night's rest; and no sooner had the daylight dawned than danger and fatigue awoke when they did. These terrible night marches were sometimes dangerous, and always horribly fatiguing to Petit-Pierre. Sometimes she went on horseback, oftener on foot,--through fields divided by hedges and embankments, which could only be crossed after darkness had fallen; through vineyards, which, in that region, trail their vines on the ground, where they catch the feet and threaten a fall at every moment; through cow-paths trampled into mud by the constant passage of the cattle,--mud which came to the knees of foot-passengers and horses.

Petit-Pierre's companions were now very anxious as to the results of this life of incessant emotion and bodily fatigue on the health of their precious charge. They deliberated on the best means of putting her, once for all, in safety. Opinions differed; some were for taking her to Paris, where she might be lost in the midst of a vast population; others proposed Nantes, where a safe concealment was already prepared; a third party counselled immediate embarkation, not thinking it possible to ensure her safety so long as she stayed in France, where search would be only the more active because the actual insurrection was at an end.

The Marquis de Souday was of the latter opinion; to which objection was made that a vigorous watch was kept along the coast, and that it would be absolutely impossible to embark from any port, however insignificant, without a passport.

Petit-Pierre cut short the discussion by declaring that she should go to Nantes, and would enter it on the morrow in full daylight, dressed as a peasant-woman. As the great change and depression visible in Mary's appearance had not, as may well be supposed, escaped her, and as she supposed, like the marquis, that they were due to the great fatigue the girl was enduring,--and as this fatigue would continue if she stayed with her father,--Petit-Pierre proposed to the marquis to take his daughter with her. The marquis accepted the offer gratefully.

Mary did not readily resign herself. Shut up in a town she was not so likely to obtain news of Bertha and Michel, which she was now awaiting from hour to hour with feverish anxiety. On the other hand, refusal was impossible, and she therefore yielded.

On the morrow, which was Saturday, and market-day, Petit-Pierre and Mary, dressed as peasant-women, started for the town at six in the morning; they had about ten miles to go. After walking for half an hour the wooden shoes, but, above all, the woollen socks, to which Petit-Pierre was not accustomed, hurt her feet. She tried to keep on; but knowing that if she blistered her feet she would be unable to continue the journey, she sat down by the wayside, took off her shoes and stockings, stuffed them into her capacious pockets, and started again barefooted.

Presently, however, she noticed, as other peasant-women passed her, that the whiteness and delicacy of her skin might betray her; she therefore turned off the road a little way, took some dark, peaty earth, and rubbed it on her feet and legs till they were stained with it, and then resumed her way.

They had just reached the top of the hill at Sorinières when they saw in front of a roadside tavern two gendarmes who were talking with a peasant like themselves,

who was on horseback.

Mary and Bertha were at this moment in the midst of a group of five or six peasant-women, and the gendarmes paid no attention to any of them. But Mary, who watched every one she passed, thinking some information as to Bertha and Michel might chance to reach her,--Mary fancied that the mounted peasant looked at her with peculiar attention. A few moments later she turned her head and saw that the peasant had left the gendarmes, and was hurrying his pony as if to overtake the group of peasant-women.

"Take care of yourself," she whispered hastily to Petit-Pierre; "there's a man I don't know who just examined me with great attention and then started to follow us. Go on alone, and seem not to know me!"

"Very good; but suppose he joins you, Mary?"

"I can answer him; don't be afraid."

"In case we are forced to separate, shall you know where to find me?"

"Yes; but don't let us say another word to each other--he is coming."

The horse's hoofs were now ringing on the paved centre of the road. Without appearing to do so Mary lagged behind the group of peasant-women. She could not help quivering when she heard, as she expected, the voice of the man addressing her.

"So we are going to Nantes, my pretty girl?" he began, pulling in his horse when he reached Mary's side, and again looking at her attentively.

"So it appears," she said, seeming to take the matter gayly.

"Don't you want my company?" asked the rider.

"Oh, no, thank you," replied Mary, imitating the speech of the Vendéan peasant-women; "I'll keep on with the rest from our parts."

"The rest from your parts? You don't expect me to believe that all those girls before us are from your village?"

"Whether they are or not, what's that to you?" retorted Mary, evading a question which was evidently insidious.

The man saw through her purpose.

"I'll make you a proposal," he said.

"What sort of proposal?"

"Get up behind me."

"Yes, that's likely!" replied Mary; "a pretty sight it would be to see a poor girl like me holding on to a man who looks like a gentleman."

"Especially as you are not accustomed to hug those who look and are such."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Mary.

"I mean that you may pass for a peasant-girl in the eyes of gendarmes; but my eyes are another thing. You are not what you are trying to seem, Mademoiselle Mary de Souday."

"If you have no evil intentions toward me why do you say my name in a loud voice on the public highway?" asked the young girl, stopping short.

"What harm is there in that?" said the rider.

"Only that those women may have heard you; and if I wear these clothes you must know it is because my interests or my safety oblige me."

"Oh!" said the man, winking one eye and affecting a knowing air; "those women you pretend to be afraid of know all about you."

"No, they do not!"

"One of them does, any how."

Mary trembled in spite of herself; but summoning all her strength of will, she replied:--

"Neither one nor all. But may I ask why you are putting these questions to me?"

"Because, if you are really alone, as you say you are, I shall ask you to stop here for a few minutes."

"I?"

"Yes."

"For what purpose?"

"To save me a long search I should have made tomorrow if I had not met you now."

"Search for what?"

"Why, for you!"

"Do you mean that you are seeking me?"

"Not on my own account, you must understand."

"But who sent you on such an errand?"

"Those who love you." Then lowering his voice he added: "Mademoiselle Bertha and Monsieur Michel."

"Bertha? Michel?"

"Yes."

"Then he is not dead!" cried Mary. "Oh, tell me, tell me, monsieur, I implore you, what has become of them?"

The terrible anxiety betrayed by the tone in which Mary said the words, the agitation of her face as she awaited the answer, which seemed to be one of life or death to her, were noticed with curiosity by Courtin, on whose lips flickered a diabolical smile. He took pleasure in delaying his answer in order to prolong the young girl's anguish.

"No, no!" he said at last, "don't be uneasy; he'll get over it!"

"Get over it! is he wounded?" asked Mary, vehemently.

"Didn't you know it?"

"Oh, my God! my God! Wounded!" cried Mary, with her eyes full of tears.

"Pooh!" said Courtin, "his wound won't keep him long in bed or hinder his marriage!"

Mary felt that she turned pale in spite of herself. Courtin's words reminded her that she had not asked news of her sister.

"And Bertha?" she said, "you have told me nothing about her."

"Your sister? Ha! she's a dashing girl! When she hooks her arm into her husband's she may well say she has earned him."

"But she is not ill, she is not wounded, is she?"

"She is a trifle ill, but that's all."

"Poor Bertha!"

"She did too much. I tell you there's many a man would have died of the strain if he had done what she did."

"Good God!" cried Mary; "both ill, and both without care!"

"Oh, as for that, no; they are caring for one another. You ought to see how your sister, ill as she is, cossets the young baron. Some men have the luck of it, that's a fact; Monsieur Michel is just as much petted by his lady dove as he was by his mother. He'll have to love her well, if he doesn't want to be ungrateful."

Mary's agitation increased at these words,--a fact which did not escape the rider's notice, and he smiled.

"Shall I tell you something that I think I have discovered?" he said.

"What is it?"

"Why, that Monsieur le baron, in the matter of color, prefers fair hair to black."

"What do you mean?" asked Mary, quivering.

"If you wish me to explain, I'll tell something that you know as well as I do; and that is, that he loves you. And if Bertha is the name of his betrothed, Mary is the name of

his heart's love."

"Oh!" cried Mary, "you are inventing all that; Monsieur de la Logerie never told you any such thing."

"No; but I have seen it for myself; and as I cherish him like my own flesh and blood, I want to see him happy, the dear lad! Therefore I said to myself yesterday, when your sister asked me to get word to you about her, that I'd clear my conscience of the matter and tell you what I think."

"You are mistaken in your thoughts, monsieur," replied Mary. "Monsieur Michel does not care for me; he is my sister's betrothed husband, and he loves her deeply; I can assure you of that."

"You are wrong not to trust me, Mademoiselle Mary. Do you know who I am? I am Courtin, Monsieur Michel's head farmer, and I may say, his confidential, man; and if you choose--"

"Monsieur Courtin, you will oblige me extremely," interrupted Mary, "if you would choose--"

"What?"

"To change the conversation."

"Very good; but allow me to renew my offer. Won't you ride behind me?--it would ease your journey. You are going to Nantes, I suppose?"

"Yes," replied Mary, who, little as she liked Courtin, thought she had better not conceal her destination from the Baron de la Logerie's confidential man.

"Well," continued Courtin, "as I am going there myself we had better go together, unless--If you are going to Nantes on an errand, and I could do it for you, I'd willingly undertake it, and save you the trouble."

Mary, in spite of her natural truthfulness, felt compelled to dissimulate; for it was all-important that no one should even guess at the cause of her journey.

"No," she replied; "it is impossible. I am on my way to join my father, who has taken refuge in Nantes, where he is now concealed."

"Dear, dear!" said Courtin, "Monsieur le marquis hiding in Nantes! that's a clever idea. They are looking for him the other way, and talk of turning the château de Souday inside out to its foundations."

"Who told you that?" asked Mary.

Courtin saw that he had made a blunder by seeming to know the plans of the government agents; he tried to repair it as best he could.

"It was chiefly to prevent you from going back there that Mademoiselle Bertha sent me in search of you," he said.

"Well, you see," said Mary, "that neither my father nor I are at Souday."

"Ah, that reminds me!" exclaimed Courtin, as if the thought had just come naturally into his head; "if Mademoiselle Bertha and Monsieur de la Logerie want to communicate with you, how are they to address you?"

"I don't know myself as yet," replied Mary. "I am to meet a man on the pont Bousseau who will take me to the house where my father is concealed. After I get there and have seen him I will write to my sister."

"Very good; if you have any communication to make, or if Monsieur le baron and your sister want to join you, and need a guide, I will undertake to manage it." Then, with a meaning smile, he added: "I'll answer for one thing; Monsieur Michel will be sending me more than once."

"Enough!" said Mary.

"Ah! excuse me. I didn't know it would make you angry."

"It does; your suppositions are offensive both to your master and to me."

"Pooh!" said Courtin, "all that is only talk. Monsieur le baron has a fine fortune, and there isn't a young lady the country round, whether she is an heiress or not, who

would turn up her nose at it. Say the word, Mademoiselle Mary," continued the farmer, who believed that everybody worshipped money as he did; "only say the word and I'll do my best to make that fortune yours."

"Maître Courtin," said Mary, stopping short, and looking at the farmer with an expression in her eye he could not mistake; "it needs all my sense of your attachment to Monsieur de la Logerie to keep me from being seriously angry. I tell you again, and once for all, you are not to speak to me in that manner!"

Courtin expected a different reply,--his conception of a "she-wolf" not admitting of such delicacy. He was all the more surprised because he saw very plainly that the young girl shared the love his prying eyes had detected in the depths of the young baron's heart. For a moment he was disconcerted. Then he reflected that he might lose all by hurrying matters; better let the fish get thoroughly entangled in the net before he pulled it in.

The mysterious man at Aigrefeuille had told him it was probable that the leaders of the Legitimist insurrection would seek shelter in Nantes. Monsieur de Souday--Courtin believed this--was there already; Mary was on her way; Petit-Pierre would probably follow. Michel's love for the young girl might be used, like Ariadne's thread, to lead the way to her retreat, which would probably be that of Petit-Pierre; and the capture of Petit-Pierre was the real end and object of Courtin's ambitious hopes. If he persisted in accompanying Mary he would rouse her suspicions; and although he was most desirous to succeed that very day in his enterprise, prudence and strategy prevailed, and he resolved to give Mary some proof which might reassure her completely as to his intentions.

"Ah!" said he, "I see you despise my horse; but all the same it hurts me to see your little feet cut to pieces on those stones."

"Well, it can't be helped," replied Mary. "I shall be less noticed on foot than if I were mounted behind you; and, if I dared, I would ask you not to keep at my side.

Anything that draws attention to me is dangerous. Let me walk alone and join those peasant-women just in front of us. I run less risk in their company."

"You are right," said Courtin; "and all the more because the gendarmes are behind and will overtake us soon."

Mary started; true enough, two gendarmes were really following them about a thousand feet back.

"Oh! you needn't be afraid," said Courtin; "I'll detain them at that tavern. Go on alone; but tell me, first, what I am to say to your sister?"

"Tell her that all my thoughts and prayers are for her welfare."

"Is that all?"

The girl hesitated; she looked at the farmer; doubtless the expression of his countenance betrayed his secret thoughts, for she lowered her head and answered:--

"Yes, that is all."

Courtin was well aware that although Mary did not utter Michel's name, he was the first and last thought of her heart.

The farmer stopped his horse. Mary, on the other hand, hastened her steps and joined the other peasant-women, who had gained some distance ahead while she talked with Courtin. As soon as she reached them she walked on by Petit-Pierre and told her what had happened,--suppressing, of course, that part of the conversation that related to the young baron.

Petit-Pierre thought it wise to evade the curiosity of the man; for his name recalled in a vague way some unpleasant memory. She therefore dropped behind the other women with Mary; and when they were fairly out of sight--thanks to a turn in the road--the two fugitives slipped into a wood at a short distance from the highway, from the edge of which they could see who passed it. After about fifteen minutes they saw Courtin hurrying, as best he could, his stubborn pony. Unfortunately, the

farmer passed too far from the place where they were hidden to allow of Petit-Pierre's recognizing him as the man who had visited Pascal Picaut's house, and cut the girths of Michel's horse.

When he was out of sight Petit-Pierre and her companion returned to the high-road and continued their way to Nantes. The nearer they came to the town, where Petit-Pierre was promised a safe retreat, the more their fears diminished. She was now quite used to her costume, and the farmers who passed them did not seem to perceive that the little peasant-woman who tripped so lightly along the road was other than she seemed to be. It was surely a great thing to have deceived an instinct so penetrating as that of the country-folk, who have no masters, and perhaps no rivals, in this respect except soldiers.

At last they came in sight of Nantes. Petit-Pierre put on her shoes and stockings, preparatory to entering the town. One thing, however, made Mary uneasy. Courtin would doubtless be watching for her on the bridge; therefore, instead of entering by the pont Rousseau, the two women took advantage of a boat to cross the Loire to the other side of the town.

As they passed the Bouffai a hand was laid on Petit-Pierre's shoulder. She started and turned round. The person who had taken that alarming liberty was a worthy old woman on her way to market, who had put down her basket of apples in order to rest herself, and was not able to lift it alone and replace it on her head.

"My dears," she said to Petit-Pierre and Mary, "do help me, please, to get up my basket, and I'll give you each an apple."

Petit-Pierre took one handle, motioned to Mary to take the other, and the basket was quickly replaced and balanced on the head of the old woman, who began to walk away without bestowing the promised reward. But Petit-Pierre caught her by the arm, saying:--

"Look here, mother, where's my apple?"

The market-woman gave it to her. Petit-Pierre set her teeth into it and was munching it with an appetite sharpened by a ten-mile walk, when, lifting her head, her eyes fell on a notice posted on the walls upon which appeared in large letters these words:--

STATE OF SIEGE.

It was a ministerial decree placing four departments in La Vendée under martial law.

Petit-Pierre went up to the notice and read it through from end to end tranquilly, in spite of Mary's entreaties to go as quickly as possible to the house where she was expected. Petit-Pierre very justly remarked that the matter was of such importance to her that she was right in obtaining a thorough knowledge of it.

Presently, however, the two women went their way into the dark and narrow streets of the old Breton city.

XXIII.

WHAT BECAME OF JEAN OULLIER.

Though it was next to impossible for the soldiers to discover Jean Oullier in the hiding-place poor Trigaud's herculean strength had made for him, nevertheless, now that Courte-Joie and his companion were dead, Jean Oullier had only exchanged the prison into which the Blues would have thrust him, had he fallen into their hands, for another prison more terrible, a death more awful than any his captors could inflict upon him. He was buried alive; and in this deserted region there was little hope that any human being would hear his cries.

Toward the middle of the night which followed his parting from his two associates, finding they did not return, he felt certain that some fatal event had overtaken them; evidently, they were either dead or prisoners. The mere idea of the position in which he himself was placed was enough to freeze the blood in the veins of the bravest man; but Jean Oullier had one of those strongly religious natures which continue a struggle in faith when the bravest despair. He commended his soul to God in a short

but fervent prayer, and then set to work as ardently as he had done in the burning ruins of La Pénissière.

Up to this time he had been crouching, bent double, with his chin on his knees; it was the only position the cramped quarters of the excavation allowed. He now endeavored to change it, and after many efforts he succeeded in getting on his knees. Then bracing himself on his hands and applying his shoulders to the heavy stone, he endeavored to raise it. But that which was child's play to Trigaud was impossible to any other man. Jean Oullier could not even shake the enormous mass which the giant had placed between him and the heavens.

He felt the ground beneath him; it was not earth but rock,--rock to right, rock to left, above and below him, rock only.

The slab of granite which Trigaud had laid like a monstrous cover on the stone box, slanted forward and left an open space about four inches wide between the bed of the rivulet and the imprisoned man, through which the air could reach him.

It was on this side that Jean Oullier, after fully reconnoitring his position, decided to apply his efforts.

He broke the point of his knife against the rock and made a chisel of it. The butt-end of his pistol answered for a hammer, and he set to work to widen the aperture. He spent twenty-four hours at this labor, without other sustenance than that contained in his huntsman's brandy-flask, from which he sipped from time to time some drops of the strengthening liquor it contained. During those twenty-four hours his courage and force of will did not desert him for a single instant.

At last, on the evening of the second day, he succeeded in passing his head through the aperture he had cut in the base of his prison; before long his shoulders could follow his head; and then, clasping the rock and making a vigorous effort, he drew out the rest of his body.

It was indeed high time that he did so; his strength was exhausted. He rose to his

knees, then to his feet, and attempted to walk. But his injured ankle had swelled to such a frightful extent during the thirty-six hours he had spent in that horribly constrained position that at the first step he took all the nerves of his body quivered as if they were wrung. He uttered a cry and fell gasping on the heather, mastered at last by the terrible pain.

Night was coming on. Listen as he might, Jean Oullier could hear no sound. The thought came to him that this night, now beginning to wrap the world in its shadows, would be his last. Again he commended his soul to God, praying him to watch over the two children he had loved so well, and who, but for him, would long ago have been orphaned through their father's indifference. Then, determined to neglect no chances, he dragged himself by his hands, or rather crept, in the direction where the sun had set, which he knew to be that of the nearest dwellings.

He had gone in this way nearly a mile when he reached a little hill, whence he could see the lights in a few lonely houses scattered on the moor. Each of them was to him a pharos, beckoning to life and safety; but, in spite of all his courage, his strength now deserted him and he could do no more. It was sixty hours since he had eaten anything. The stumps of the brambles and the gorse, cut down in the haying season and sharpened by the scythe, had torn his hands and chest, and loss of blood from these wounds still further weakened him.

He allowed himself to roll into a ditch by the wayside; determined to go no farther, but to die there. Intense thirst possessed him, and he drank a little water which was stagnant in the ditch. He was so weak that his hand could scarcely reach his mouth; his head seemed absolutely empty. From time to time he fancied he heard in his brain a dull, lugubrious roar, like that of the sea making a breach over a ship and about to engulf it; a sort of veil seemed to spread before his eyes, and behind that veil coursed myriads of sparks, which died away and sparkled again like phosphorescent gleams.

The unfortunate man felt that this was death. He tried to shout, not caring whether enemies or friends came to his relief; but his voice died away in his throat, and he scarcely heard himself the hoarse cry which he managed to emit.

Thus he remained for over an hour, in a dying condition. Then, little by little, the veil before his eyes thickened and took prismatic tints; the humming in his brain had strange modulations, and for a time he lost consciousness of all about him.

But his powerful being could not be annihilated without a further struggle; the lethargic stillness in which he remained for some time allowed the heart to regulate its pulses, the blood to circulate less feverishly. The torpor in which he now lay did not lessen the acuteness of his senses. Presently he heard a sound which his huntsman's ear did not mistake for a single instant. A step was coming across the heather, and that step he knew to be a woman's.

That woman could save him! Torpid as he was, Jean Oullier understood it. But when he tried to call or make a movement to attract her attention he was like a man in a trance, who sees the preparations for his funeral and is unable to arrest them; he perceived with terror that nothing remained of him but his intelligence, and that his body, completely paralyzed, refused to obey him. As the hapless being nailed in his coffin makes frantic efforts to burst the iron barrier which parts him from the world, so Jean Oullier strained at every spring which Nature puts at the service of man's will to conquer matter. In vain.

And yet, the steps were coming nearer; each minute, each second made them more distinct, more unmistakable to his ear. He fancied that every pebble they displaced rolled to his heart; his agony from the multiplicity of his abortive efforts grew intense; his hair rose on his head; an icy sweat stood on his brow. It was worse and more cruel than death itself, for death feels nothing.

The woman passed.

Jean Oullier heard the thorns on the briers catch and scrape her dress as if even they

wished to stop her; he saw her shadow lying dark upon the bushes; then she passed away, and the sound of her steps was lost in the sighing of the wind among the reeds.

The unfortunate man believed he was doomed; and the moment hope abandoned him the awful struggle he had fought against himself came to an end. He recovered calmness and mentally prayed to God, commending his soul to Him.

This prayer so absorbed him that it was not until he heard the noisy breathing of a dog, which passed its head through the bushes scenting an emanation, that he noticed the coming of an animal. He turned, with an effort, not his head, that was impossible, but his eyes in the direction of the creature, and there saw a cur gazing at him with frightened but intelligent eyes.

Catching Jean Oullier's gaze the animal retreated to a little distance and began to bark. At this instant Jean Oullier fancied that he heard the woman calling to her dog; but the creature did not choose to leave its post, continuing to bark. It was a last hope,--a hope that was not balked.

Tired of calling to her dog, and curious to know what excited it, the woman retraced her steps. Chance, or Providence, willed that this woman should be the widow of Pascal Picaut. As she neared the bushes she saw a man; stooping over him she recognized Jean Oullier.

At first she thought him dead; then she saw his eyes, unnaturally wide open, fixed upon her. She laid her hand upon the huntsman's heart and felt it beating; she lifted him to a sitting posture, threw a little water on his face, and poured a few drops through his clenched teeth. Then--as if through contact with a living being he recovered contact with life itself--Jean Oullier felt the enormous weight which lay upon him lightening; warmth returned to his torpid limbs; he felt its glow steal softly to each extremity; tears of gratitude welled from his eyelids and rolled down his sunken cheeks; he caught the woman's hand and carried it to his lips, wetting it with

tears.

She, on her side, was greatly moved. Philippist as she was, the good woman highly esteemed the old Chouan.

"Well, well," she said, "don't take on so, my Jean Oullier! It is all natural, what I am doing! I'd do as much for any Christian; and all the more for you, who are a man after God's own heart!"

"That doesn't prevent--" said Jean Oullier.

He could say no more, his breath failed him.

"Doesn't prevent what?" asked the widow.

Oullier made an effort.

"Doesn't prevent--that I owe you my life," he said.

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Marianne.

"It is as I say. Without you, I should have died."

"Without my dog, Jean. You see it isn't me, but the good God you have to thank." Then noticing with horror that he was covered with blood, "Why, you are wounded!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, no, nothing but scratches. My worst trouble is that I have dislocated my ankle; and besides, I haven't eaten anything for nearly three days. It is chiefly weakness that is killing me."

"Good gracious! but see here, I was just carrying dinner to some men who are getting litter for me on the moor. You shall have their soup."

So saying, the widow put down the basket she was carrying, untied the four corners of a cloth in which were several porringers full of soup and bouilli smoking hot. She gave several spoonfuls to Jean Oullier, who felt his strength returning as every mouthful of the warm and succulent broth got down into his stomach.

"Ah!" he said; and he breathed noisily.

A smile of satisfaction crossed the grave, sad face of the widow.

"Now," she said, sitting down opposite to him, "what are you going to do? Of course you know the red-breeches are after you?"

"Alas!" said Jean Oullier; "I have lost all power with my poor leg. It will be months before I can roam the woods as I must to escape a prison. What I had better do," he added with a sigh, "is to get to Maître Jacques; he will give me a corner in some of his burrows, where I can stay till my leg is well."

"But your master?--and his daughters?"

"The marquis won't go back yet awhile to Souday; and he is right."

"What will he do, then?"

"Probably cross the channel with the young ladies."

"That's a pretty idea of yours, Jean Oullier, to go and live among that crew of bandits who follow Maître Jacques! Fine care they'll take of you!"

"They are the only ones who can take me in without being compromised."

"How about me? You forget me, and that isn't nice of you, Jean."

"You?"

"Yes, me!"

"But you forget the ordinance."

"What ordinance?"

"About the penalties incurred by those who harbor Chouans."

"Pooh! my Jean; such orders are not issued for honest folk, but for scoundrels!"

"Besides, you hate Chouans."

"No; it is only brigands I hate, whichever side they are. They were brigands who killed my poor Pascal, and on those brigands I'll avenge his death if I can. But you, Jean Oullier, your cockade, be it white or tricolor, is that of an honest man, and I'll

save you."

"But I can't walk a step."

"That's no matter. Even if you could walk, Jean, I'd be afraid to take you to my house by daylight,--not that I fear for myself; but ever since the death of that young man I fear treachery. Get back under those bushes; hide as best you can; wait till dark, and I'll come back with a cart and fetch you. Then, to-morrow, I'll go for the bone-setter at Machecoul; he'll rub his hand over the nerves of your foot, and in three days you'll run like a rabbit."

"Hang it! I know that would be best, but--"

"Wouldn't you do as much for me?"

"You know, Marianne, I'd go through fire and water for you."

"Then don't say another word. I shall be back after dark."

"Thank you; I accept your offer. You may be very sure you are not helping an ungrateful man."

"It is not to get your gratitude I am doing it, Jean Oullier; but to fulfil my duty as an honest woman."

She looked about her.

"What are you looking for?" asked Jean.

"I was thinking if you tried to get farther back among the bushes you would be safer than in this ditch."

"I think it is impossible," said Oullier, showing his ankle, now swelled to the size of a man's head, and his torn hands and face. "Besides, I am not badly off here; you passed close by these bushes and did not suspect they hid a man."

"Yes, but a dog might pass and smell you out, just as mine did. Remember, my Jean, the war is over, and the days of denunciation and vengeance will begin, if they have not already begun."

"Bah!" said Jean Oullier, "we must leave something for the good God to do."

The widow was no less of a believer than the old Chouan. She gave him a piece of bread, cut an armful of ferns with which she made him a bed, and then, after carefully raising the branches of the briers and brambles about him, and satisfying herself that the eye of no passer would detect him, she departed, exhorting him to patience.

Jean Oullier settled himself as comfortably as he could, offered a fervent thanksgiving to the Lord, munched his bread, and presently went to sleep in that heavy sleep which follows great prostration.

He must have been lying there several hours when the sound of voices woke him. In the species of somnolence which followed the state of torpor he had been in, he fancied he heard the name of his young mistresses; suspicious as all men of his stamp are in the matter of their affections, he fancied some danger must be threatening either Bertha or Mary, and the thought was like a lever, which lifted in a second the torpor of his mind. He rose on his elbow, gently moved the brambles which made a thick rampart before him, and looked through them into the road.

It was dark, but not dark enough to prevent him from seeing the outline of two men who were sitting on a fallen tree on the other side of the road.

"Why didn't you continue to follow her, as you recognized her?" said one of them whom, from his strong German accent, Jean Oullier judged to be a stranger in these regions.

"Ha! damn it!" said the other. "She-wolf as she is, I never thought her so wily; but she gave me the slip, fool that I was."

"You might have been certain that the one we were after was in that group of peasant-women, and that Mary de Souday only stayed behind to meet and detain you."

"As for that, you are right enough; for when I asked that same group of women

where the young girl was they said that she and her companion had lagged behind and left them on the road."

"What did you do then?"

"Hang it! I put up the pony at an inn, and hid myself at the farther end of Pirmile and waited for them."

"In vain, I suppose."

"In vain,--for more than two hours."

"They must have taken a cross-road and entered Nantes by the other bridge."

"Probably."

"It is very unfortunate. Who knows if such a piece of luck will ever happen to you again? Perhaps you may never find her now."

"Oh, yes. I shall. Let me alone for that."

"How will you do it?"

"Oh!--as my neighbor the Marquis de Souday, or my friend Jean Oullier would say--'God wants her soul;' and I have at home just the bloodhound we need for the hunt."

"Bloodhound?"

"Yes, a regular bloodhound. There is something the matter with one of his front paws, but as soon as that is well I'll put a chain round his neck and he'll take us straight in the direction we want to go, without any trouble to us, except taking care he does not pull too hard on the chain and break it in his hurry to get there."

"Come, stop joking; these are serious matters."

"Joking! what do you take me for? Do you suppose I joke in presence of the fifty thousand francs you have promised me?--for you really did say fifty thousand, didn't you?"

"You ought to be sure of it, for you have made me tell you a score of times."

"I know that; but I am never tired of hearing it, any more than I shall be tired of fingering the louis when I get them."

"Deliver us the person we want, and you shall have them."

"Bless me! I hear those yellow-boys chinking in my ears,--dzing! dzing!"

"Meantime, tell me what you mean by a bloodhound."

"Oh! I'd tell you willingly, but--"

"But what?"

"Give and take, you know."

"What do you mean by 'give and take'?"

"Well, as I told you the other day, I wish to oblige the government, partly because I respect it, and partly because I like to harass the nobles and all that belong to them--for I hate 'em all. But, all the same, while obliging the government of my choice, I should be glad to see the color of its money,--for, don't you see, thus far I have given it much more than I receive. Besides, how do I know that if the government lays hold of that person for whom they offer her weight in gold, how do I know, I say, that they will pay what they promised me, or rather promised you?"

"You are a fool."

"I should be a fool if I did not say what I am saying to you now. I like to make myself secure; and if I must speak frankly, I don't see much security in this affair."

"You run the same risks that I do. I have received from an eminent person the promise of one hundred thousand francs if I succeed."

"One hundred thousand francs! That's very little to have come so far to get. Come, own that it is two hundred thousand, and that you give me a quarter of it; because I am on the spot and don't have to travel for the money as you do. Two hundred thousand francs! You are pretty lucky! A good round sum and rings well. So be it,

I'll have confidence in the government; but, let me ask, why should I have it in you? How can I be sure you won't slip off with the money when the government pays it? And if you should, where's the court or the judge before whom I could sue you, I'd like to know?"

"My good sir, political associates must trust each other; faith signs their contract."

"Is that why they are so wonderfully well kept? Frankly, I'd prefer another signature."

"Whose?"

"Yours, or that of the minister with whom you are dealing."

"Well, we'll try to satisfy you."

"Hush!"

"What?"

"Don't you hear something?"

"Yes; some one is coming this way. I think I hear the wheels of a cart."

The two men rose at once, and by the light of the moon, which was then shining, Jean Oullier, who had not lost a single word of the conversation, saw their faces. One of the men was a stranger to him; the other proved to be Courtin,--a fact he knew already by the tones of the farmer's voice and the mention he had made of Michel and the "she-wolves."

"Let us go," said the stranger.

"No," replied Courtin; "I've a number of things to say to you. Let us hide in this bush till the cart has gone by, and then we can finish our business."

They walked toward the ditch. Jean knew he was lost; but, unwilling to be caught like a hare on its form, he rose to his knees, and pulled his knife from his belt. It was blunt, to be sure, but in a hand to hand struggle could still be of use. He had no other weapon and supposed the two men to be unarmed. But Courtin, who had seen a

man's form rise in the bush and heard the rustle of the reeds and brambles, made three steps backward, seized his gun hidden behind the fallen tree, cocked one barrel, lifted the weapon to his shoulder, and fired. A stifled cry followed the explosion.

"What have you done?" cried the stranger, who seemed to think Courtin's action rather too expeditious.

"See! see!" replied Courtin, trembling and very pale; "a man was watching us."

The stranger went to the bushes and parted the branches.

"Take care! take care!" said Courtin; "if it is a Chouan and he is not quite dead, he'll attack you."

So saying, Courtin, with his other barrel cocked, held himself ready to fire at a safe distance.

"It is a peasant," said the stranger, "but I think he is dead."

So saying, he took Jean Oullier by the arm and dragged him out of the ditch. Courtin, seeing that the man was motionless and apparently dead, ventured to approach.

"Jean Oullier!" he cried out, recognizing the Vendéan, "Jean Oullier! My faith! I never expected to kill a man, but since it was to be, it is a grand thing it was he instead of another. That, I can truly say, deserves to be called a lucky shot."

"Meantime," said the stranger, "here comes the cart."

"Yes, it is at the top of the hill, for the horse is trotting. Come, there's no time to lose; we had better be off. Is he really dead?"

"He seems so."

"Very good; forward then."

The stranger dropped Jean Oullier's arm, and the head fell back upon the ground with the heavy thud of a deadweight.

"Yes, yes, he's dead, sure enough!" said Courtin. Then, not daring to go nearer, he pointed his finger at the body. "There," said he, "that secures us our pay better than any signature; that dead body is worth two hundred thousand francs to us."

"How so?"

"He was the only man who could get that bloodhound I told you about away from me. I thought he was dead. I was mistaken. Now that I know it with my own eyes, we are safe. Forward! forward!"

"Yes, for here comes the cart."

The vehicle was now not a hundred steps from the body. The two men sprang into the bushes and disappeared in the darkness, while the widow Picaut, who was coming for Jean Oullier, alarmed by the shot, ran forward to the place where she had left him.

XXIV.

MAÎTRE COURTIN'S BATTERIES.

A few weeks had sufficed to bring about a radical upsetting of the lives of all those personages who, from the beginning of this narrative, have successively passed under the eyes of the reader.

Martial law was proclaimed in the four departments of La Vendée. The general who commanded them issued a proclamation inviting the country-people to give in their submission, promising to receive it with indulgence. The attempt at insurrection had so miserably failed that the greater part of the Vendéans abandoned all hope for the future. A few of them, who were openly compromised, followed the advice of their own leaders, given when they disbanded them, and gave up their arms. But the civil authorities would not accept this capitulation; they seized the offered arms and arrested their owners. A goodly number of these confiding persons were thrown into prison, and this impolitic severity paralyzed the pacific intentions of those who with

greater prudence were awaiting events.

Maître Jacques owed to these proceedings a large increase in the number of his troop; he made so much, and made it so cleverly, out of the conduct of his adversaries, that he finally gathered about him a body of men large enough to still hold out in the forests while the rest of La Vendée disarmed itself.

Gaspard, Louis Renaud, Bras-d'Acier, and other leaders put the sea between them and a stern government. The Marquis de Souday alone could not resolve upon that step. Ever since he had parted from Petit-Pierre--that is, ever since Petit-Pierre had left him--the unfortunate gentleman had completely lost the jovial good-humor with which, as a matter of honor, he had, up to the last moment, opposed the gloomy views of his co-leaders; but as soon as duty no longer forced him to be gay, the marquis dropped to the lower extreme and became, as we may say, sad unto death. The defeat at Chêne not only wounded him in his political sympathies, but it knocked over to their foundations all the castles in Spain he had been so gleefully erecting. He now saw in this partisan existence, which his imagination had been endowing with romantic charm, things he had never dreamed of,--reverses which overwhelmed him, obscure poverty, the mean and trivial privations of an exile's life. He reached a point,--even he, who so recently had thought life in his little castle insufferably insipid,--he reached a point at which he regretted the good, pleasant evenings which the caresses and chatter of his girls made so pleasant,--above all, he missed his gossip with Jean Oullier; and he was so unhappy over the latter's continued absence that he made inquiries about his huntsman's fate with a solicitude not in any way customary with him.

The marquis was in this frame of mind when he one day encountered Maître Jacques loitering about the environs of Grand-Lieu and watching the movements of a column of soldiers. The Marquis de Souday had never had much liking for the master of "rabbits," whose first act of discipline had been to defy his authority. The

independent spirit displayed by Maître Jacques had always seemed to the old gentleman a fatal example set to the Vendéans. Maître Jacques, on the other hand, hated the marquis, as he hated all whose birth or social position gave them naturally the position of leaders; and yet he was so touched by the misery to which he saw the old gentleman reduced in the cottage where, after Petit-Pierre's departure, the marquis had taken refuge, that he offered to hide him in the forest of Touvois; promising, besides the good cheer which always reigned in his little camp, and which he proposed to share with him, some amusement in occasional frays indulged in with the soldiers of King Louis-Philippe. Needless to say that the marquis always bluntly called that king "Philippe."

It was the last consideration we have mentioned which determined Monsieur de Souday to accept Maître Jacques' proposals. He burned to avenge the ruin of his hopes, and to make some one pay for his disappointments, for the annoyance his separation from his daughters caused him, and for the grief he felt at Jean Oullier's disappearance. He accordingly accompanied the lord of the burrows, who, from being his subordinate--or rather his insubordinate--now became his protector; and the latter, really touched by the simplicity and good-nature of the marquis, showed him much more considerate attention than his rough exterior and ways of life would seem to promise.

As for Bertha, the day after her retreat to Courtin's house, and as soon as she recovered some strength, she plainly perceived that to be under the same roof with the man she loved, far from the protection of her father, and without Jean Oullier, who could in a way replace him, was, to say the least of it, an impropriety; and, in spite of the fact that Michel was wounded, might be interpreted in a way to injure her reputation. She therefore left the farmhouse and installed herself with Rosine in the Tinguy cottage. This was about three quarters of a mile distant from Courtin's house, where she went daily to give Michel all the care of a sister, and the delicate attentions of a loving woman.

The tenderness, devotion, and self-abnegation of which Bertha gave Michel so many proofs touched the young man deeply; but as they did not in any degree affect his feelings for Mary, his situation became more and more difficult and embarrassing. He dared not think of the despair he might bring into the heart of the young girl to whom he owed his life. Nevertheless, little by little, a gentle resignation did succeed the bitter and violent repulsion he had felt at first, and without habituating himself to the idea of the sacrifice Mary demanded of him, he replied by smiles, which he tried to make affectionate, to the attentions which Bertha showered on him; and when she left his bedside the sigh that escaped him, and which she interpreted as meant for her, alone testified to his inward feelings.

If it had not been for Courtin, who always came to his room as soon as Bertha had disappeared through the trees of the garden, and sitting beside him talked of Mary, Michel's tender and impressionable soul might have ended in resigning itself to the necessities of the situation, and in accepting the fate they made for him. But Courtin talked to his young master so incessantly of Mary, he showed so earnest a wish to see him happy according to his heart's desire, that Michel, as the wound in his arm healed and his strength returned, felt his inward wound reopening, and his gratitude to Bertha disappearing before the image of her sister.

Courtin was doing a work analogous to that of Penelope; he undid at night that which Bertha, with so much care, had done by day. When he brought the young baron to his house the latter's feebleness precluded all necessity of asking pardon for his former conduct; and now, having, as we have heard him tell, got possession of Michel's secret, he managed, by protestations of devotion to his interests and by cleverly encouraging the young man's love for Bertha's sister, to worm himself back entirely into his master's confidence. Michel had suffered as much from not being able to tell his woes as from the woes themselves. Courtin seemed to be so sympathizing, he flattered his dreams so pleasantly, he seemed to admire Mary so truly, that, little by little, he led Michel to betray, if not to confess, what had passed

between him and the sisters.

Courtin was very careful, however, not to assume a position hostile to Bertha. He managed, cleverly enough, to make her think he was devoted to the idea of her marriage with his young master. When they met away from Michel he always spoke to her as though to his future mistress; and he did this so well that Bertha, knowing nothing of his antecedents, was constantly talking to Michel of the great devotion of his farmer, whom she called "our good Courtin."

But no sooner was he alone with Michel than he entered, as we have said, into all the latter's secret feelings. He pitied him; and Michel, under the influence of that pity, allowed himself to tell his farmer the incidents of his relation to Mary. Courtin constantly repeated to him, "She loves you;" insinuating that he, Michel, ought to force Mary with a gentle violence, for which she would certainly be grateful, to follow the dictates of her own heart. He even went beyond Michel's own hopes and assured him that as soon as he was well and communications were once more open, he could so arrange matters that, without ingratitude to Bertha, she could be brought to renounce, of herself, the projected marriage.

Michel's convalescence did not progress as rapidly as Courtin desired. He saw, with deep anxiety, the days go by without affording any clue as to Petit-Pierre's actual hiding-place; and he restlessly awaited the moment when he could let loose his young master on Mary's traces,--for, of course, the reader has understood that Michel was the "bloodhound" he had talked of using.

Bertha, relieved of all anxiety about Michel's wound, had made, with Rosine, several trips into the forest of Touvois to see her father in his present refuge. Two or three times after such excursions Courtin had led the conversation to persons concerned in the insurrection in whom the sisters would probably take an interest; but Bertha remained impenetrable; and the farmer was too well aware that the topic was dangerous, and that the slightest imprudence on his part would speedily awaken

suspicion, to press such inquiries. Still, as Michel grew better and stronger, he urged him, whenever they were alone together, to come to a determination; offering to take a letter at any time to Mary and bring back her answer, doing his best to make it favorable.

This state of things lasted six weeks. At the end of that time Michel was almost well; his wound had healed and his strength returned. The neighborhood of the post which the general had established at La Logerie prevented the young man from showing himself during the daytime; but as soon as it was dark he walked about the orchard leaning on Bertha's arm. These evening promenades annoyed Courtin, who, so long as Bertha and Michel talked together in the house, could overhear what they said by eavesdropping; and one day he told them positively that their nocturnal rambles must cease. On being asked why, he produced a judgment by default which condemned Michel de la Logerie to death.

This communication produced but little effect on Michel, but Bertha was terror-stricken. She almost flung herself at the young man's feet, and begged his pardon for having enticed him into this fatal position; and that night when she left the farmhouse she was in a state of pitiable agitation.

The next day she came early. All night she had dreamed dreadful dreams, and they followed her waking. She saw Michel discovered, arrested, shot! Two hours earlier than usual she was at the farmhouse. Nothing had happened; nothing seemed to make that day more alarming than other days. It passed as usual,--full of charm mingled with anguish for Bertha; full of melancholy internal aspirations for Michel.

Evening came,--a beautiful summer's evening. Bertha was leaning against a little window looking out into the orchard; she was watching the sunset beyond the great trees of the forest of Machecoul, the tops of which were undulating like waves of verdure. Michel was sitting on his bed breathing in the soft odors of the coming night. Suddenly they heard the wheels of a carriage coming up the avenue.

The young man darted to the window. Both saw a calèche entering the courtyard. Courtin ran to the carriage, hat in hand; a head looked out,--it was that of the Baronne de la Logerie.

Michel, on seeing his mother, felt a cold chill run through his veins; it was evident that she had come for him. Bertha questioned him with her eyes to ask what she ought to do. Michel pointed to a dark corner,--a sort of closet or recess without a door,--where she might hide, and hear all without being seen herself. He thought he should gather strength from her secret presence. Five minutes later the stairs creaked under his mother's step.

Bertha had rushed to her hiding-place and Michel had seated himself near the window, as if he had neither seen nor heard anything. The door opened and the baroness appeared.

Perhaps she had come with the intention of being harsh and stern as usual; but on seeing Michel by the paling light, pale himself as the twilight, she abandoned all severity, and opening her arms, cried out:--

"Oh, my unhappy child! have I found you?"

Michel, who did not expect this reception, was greatly moved; and he flung himself into his mother's open arms crying:--

"Oh, mother,--mother! My good mother!"

She, too, was greatly changed; traces were plainly to be seen upon her face of incessant tears and sleepless nights.

XXV.

MADAME LA BARONNE DE LA LOGERIE, THINKING TO SERVE HER SON'S INTERESTS, SERVES THOSE OF PETIT-PIERRE.

The baroness sat down, or rather, fell into a chair, drawing Michel to his knees before her, and taking his head, which she pressed to her lips. At last the words

which she seemed unable to bring out came to her.

"Is it possible that you are here in this place, not a hundred steps away from the château, which is full of soldiers?"

"The nearer I am to them, mother," replied Michel, "the less they'll look for me here."

"But don't you know what has taken place in Nantes?"

"What has taken place there?"

"The military courts have passed sentence after sentence."

"That only signifies to those they catch," said Michel, laughing.

"It signifies to every one," said his mother; "for those who are not taken may be taken at any moment."

"Not when they are hiding in the house of a mayor well-known for his Philippist opinions."

"You are none the less--"

The baroness stopped, as if her mouth refused to utter the words.

"Go on, mother!"

"You are none the less condemned--"

"Condemned to death; I know that."

"What! you know it, unhappy boy, and you stay here quietly?"

"I tell you, mother, that as long as I am with Courtin I'm quite safe."

"Then he has been kind to you, has he, that man?"

"He has been simply a second providence. He found me wounded and dying of hunger; he brought me home, and since then he has fed and hidden me."

"I must own I have distrusted him."

"Then you are wrong, mother."

"Maybe so. But talk of our own affairs, my dear child. No matter how well hidden you may be, you cannot stay here."

"Why not?"

"Because a mere chance, the slightest imprudence would betray you." Michel shook his head. "You don't want me to die of terror, do you?" said his mother.

"No no; I will listen to you."

"Well, I shall die of terror if you stay in France."

"But, mother, have you reflected on the difficulties of flight?"

"Yes; and I have surmounted them."

"How so?"

"I have chartered a small Dutch vessel which is now lying in the river opposite to Couéron. Get on board of her and go. God grant that you are strong enough for the journey." Michel did not answer. "You will go to England," continued his mother. "You will leave this cursed land which drank your father's blood; say you will, my son! So long as you stay here I cannot have an easy moment; I fancy at all hours I see the hand of the executioner stretched out to tear you from my arms." Still Michel kept silence. "Here," continued the baroness, "is a letter to the captain; and here too is an order for fifty thousand francs to your credit in England or America. Wherever you are, write to me, so that I may follow and join you. But what is the matter? Why don't you answer me?"

The fact is, Michel received this proposal with an insensibility which almost amounted to stupor. Go away? why, that was to part from Mary! At the mere idea of that separation his heart was so wrung that he fancied he would rather face the death to which he was condemned. Since Courtin had assisted in reviving his passion, he had in his heart conceived new hopes, and without saying a word of them to his farmer, he thought day and night on the means of getting to her. He could not endure

the idea of once more renouncing her; and instead of replying to his mother as she developed her plan, he was simply strengthening his determination to be Mary's husband. Hence the silence which, naturally, made the baroness uneasy.

"Mother," said Michel at last, "I do not answer you because I cannot answer as I wish."

"How do you mean, as you wish?"

"Listen to me, mother," said the young man, with a firmness of which at any other time she would have thought him, and perhaps he might have thought himself, incapable.

"You don't refuse to go, I hope?"

"I don't refuse to go," said Michel, "but I put conditions to my going."

"Conditions where it concerns your life, your safety? Conditions before you consent to relieve your mother's agony?"

"Mother," said Michel, "since we last saw each other I have suffered much, and consequently I have learned much. I have learned, above all, that there are moments which decide the whole future happiness or misery of our lives. I am now in one of those moments, mother."

"And you mean to decide for my misery?"

"No; I shall speak to you as a man, that is all. Do not be surprised at that; I was thrown, a child, into the midst of these events, and I have come out of them a man. I know the duties I owe my mother; those duties are respect, tenderness, gratitude,--and those duties I will never evade. But in passing from youth to manhood, mother, horizons open and broaden the farther we go; there we find duties, succeeding those of youth, not exclusively to our family, but also to society. When a man reaches that stage in his life, though he still loves his mother, he must inevitably love another woman, who will be to him the mother of his children."

"Ah!" exclaimed the baroness, starting back from her son with an impulse that was stronger than her will.

"Yes, mother," said the young man, rising, "I have given that love; another love has replied to mine; our lives are indissolubly united; if I go, I will not go alone."

"You will go with your mistress?"

"I will go with my wife, mother."

"Do you suppose that I shall give my consent to that marriage?"

"You are free not to give your consent, mother, but I am free not to leave this place."

"Oh, wretched boy!" cried the baroness; "is this my reward for twenty years of care, and tenderness, and love?"

"That reward, mother," said Michel, his firmness increased by the knowledge that another ear was listening to his words, "you have in the respect I bear you, and the devotion of which I will give you proofs on every occasion. But true maternal love is not a usurer; it does not say, 'I will be twenty years thy mother in order to be thy tyrant;' it does not say, 'I will give thee life, youth, strength, intelligence, in order that all those powers shall be obedient to my will.' No, mother, true maternal love says: 'While thou wert feeble I supported thee; while thou wert ignorant I taught thee; while thou wert blind I led thee. To-day thou art strong and capable; make thy future life, not according to my will, but thine own; choose one among the many paths before thee, and wherever it may lead, love, bless, reverence the mother who made and trained thee to be strong;' that is the power of a mother over her son, as I see it; that is the respect and the duty which he owes to her."

The baroness was speechless; she would sooner have expected the skies to fall than to hear such firm and argumentative language from her son. She looked at him in stupefaction.

Proudly satisfied with himself, Michel looked at her calmly, with a smile upon his

lips.

"So," she said, "nothing will induce you to give up this folly?"

"Say rather that nothing will induce me to break my word."

"Oh!" cried the baroness, pressing her hands upon her eyes, "unhappy mother that I am!"

Michel knelt beside her.

"I say to you: blessed mother you will be on the day you make the happiness of your son!"

"What is there so seductive about those wolves?" cried the baroness.

"By whatever name you call the woman I love," said Michel, "I shall reply to you: she has every quality that a man should seek in a wife; and it is not for you and me, mother, who have suffered so much from calumny, to seize, as readily as you have done, on the calumnies told of others."

"No, no, no!" cried the baroness, "never will I consent to such a marriage!"

"In that case, mother," said Michel, "take back those cheques and the letter to the captain of the vessel; they are useless to me, for I will not leave this place."

"What else can you do, you miserable boy?"

"Oh, that's simple enough. I'd rather die than live separated from her I love. I am cured. I am able to shoulder a musket. The remains of the insurrectionary army are collected in the forest of Touvois under command of the Marquis de Souday. I will join them, and fight with them, and get myself killed at the first chance. This is the second time death has missed me," he added with a pallid smile. "The third time his aim may be true and his hand steady."

The young man laid the letters and cheques on his mother's knees. In his tones and gestures there was such resolution and firmness that his mother saw that she cherished in vain the hope of changing him. In presence of that conviction her

strength gave way.

"Well," she said, "be it according to your will, and may God forget that you have forced your mother to yield to you."

"God will forget it, mother; and when you see the happiness of your son you will forget it yourself."

The baroness shook her head.

"Go," she said, "marry, far away from me, a stranger I do not know and have never seen."

"I shall marry, I hope, a woman whom you will know and appreciate, mother; and that great day of my happiness will be blessed by your sanction. You have offered to join me wherever I go; wherever that may be I shall expect you, mother."

The baroness rose and made a few steps toward the door.

"Going without a word of farewell, without a kiss, mother? Are you not afraid it may bring me evil?"

"My unhappy boy, come to my arms, to my heart!"

And she said the words with that maternal cry which, sooner or later, must come from a mother's heart. Michel pressed her tenderly to his breast.

"When will you go, my child?" she said.

"That must depend on her, mother."

"As soon as possible, will you not?"

"To-night, I hope."

"You will find a peasant's dress below in the carriage. Disguise yourself as best you can. It is twenty-four miles from here to Couéron. You could get there by five in the morning. Don't forget the vessel's name,--the 'Jeune Charles.'"

"Don't be anxious, mother. The moment I know my end is happiness I shall take

every precaution to reach it."

"As for me, I shall go back to Paris and use all my influence to get that fatal sentence revoked. But you--I entreat you, and I repeat it--take care of your life, and remember that my life is wrapped up in yours."

Mother and son again kissed each other, and Michel took his mother to the door. Courtin, as a faithful servitor, was keeping watch below. Madame de la Logerie begged him to accompany her to the château.

When Michel, after locking the door, turned round he saw Bertha, with a smile of happiness on her lips, and a halo of love about her head. She was waiting the moment to throw herself into his arms. Michel received her in them; and if the little room had not been dark she must have seen the embarrassment on the young baron's face.

"And now," she said, "nothing can part us; we have my father's consent, and now your mother's."

Michel was silent.

"Shall we start to-night?"

Still Michel said nothing.

"Well," she said, "why don't you answer me?"

"Because nothing is less sure than our departure," he replied.

"But you promised your mother to go to-night."

"I told my mother it depended on her."

"That is, on me," said Bertha.

"What!" exclaimed Michel, "would Bertha, true royalist and so devoted to the cause, leave France without thinking of those she leaves behind her?"

"What can you mean?" asked Bertha.

"I mean something grander and more useful to the country than my own escape, my personal safety," said the young man.

Bertha looked at him in astonishment.

"I mean the escape and safety of Madame," added Michel.

Bertha gave a cry; she began to understand.

"Ah!" she ejaculated.

"That vessel my mother has chartered for me can take from France not only you and me, but the princess, your father, and," he added in a lower voice, "your sister."

"Oh, Michel, Michel!" cried the young girl, "forgive me for not thinking of that! Just now I loved you; now I admire you! Yes, yes, you are right; Providence itself inspired your mother; yes, I will forget all the hard and cruel things she said of me, for I see in her an instrument of God sent to our succor to save us all. Oh, my friend, how good you are!--more than that, you are grand for having thought of it."

The young man stammered unintelligible words.

"Ah!" continued Bertha, in her enthusiasm, "I knew you were the bravest and most loyal of men; but to-day you have gone beyond my hopes and expectations. Poor child! wounded, condemned to death, he thinks of others before he thinks of himself! Ah, friend, I was happy, now I am proud in my love!"

If the room had been lighted Bertha must have seen the flush on Michel's cheek; he knew what his disinterestedness really was. It is true that after obtaining his mother's consent to marry the woman he loved, Michel had really dreamed of something else,--namely, the idea of rendering to Petit-Pierre the greatest service the most devoted follower could do for her at that moment, and afterward avow all and ask her, as a reward for that service, to procure for him Mary's hand. We can readily imagine his shame and confusion of face in Bertha's presence, and why, to all these demonstrations of the young girl the baron, cold in spite of himself, replied

merely:--

"Now that all is arranged for us, Bertha, we have no time to lose."

"No," she said, "you are right. Give your orders. Now that I recognize the superiority not only of your heart but of your mind, I am ready to obey."

"Well," said Michel, "we must part here."

"Why so?" asked Bertha.

"Because you must go to the forest of Touvois and notify your father of what has happened, and bring him away with you. From there you must get to the bay of Bourgneuf, where the 'Jeune Charles' shall stop and pick you up. I shall go to Nantes and tell the duchess."

"You, in Nantes! Do you forget that you are condemned to death and that the authorities are watching for you? It is I who must go to Nantes and you to Touvois."

"But the 'Jeune Charles' expects me, Bertha, and in all probability the captain would obey no one but me; seeing a woman in place of a man he might suspect some trap and throw us into inextricable difficulties."

"But just reflect on the dangers you run in Nantes."

"On the contrary, it may be, if you think of it, Bertha, the very place where I should run the least. They will never suppose that, being condemned to death in Nantes, I should enter the town which condemned me. You know very well that there are times when the greatest boldness is the greatest safety. This is one of those times; and you must let me do as I choose."

"I told you I would obey you, Michel; I obey."

And the proud and beautiful young girl, submissive as a child, awaited the orders of the man who, thanks to an appearance of devotion, had just acquired almost gigantic proportions in her eyes.

Nothing was simpler than the decision they had made and its mode of execution.

Bertha gave Michel the address of the duchess in Nantes and the different passwords by which he could gain admittance to her. She herself, dressed in Rosine's clothes, was to reach the forest of Touvois. Michel, of course, was to wear the peasant's costume brought to him by his mother. If nothing occurred to interfere with these arrangements the "Jeune Charles" would be able to sail at five o'clock on the following morning, carrying Petit-Pierre away from France, and with her the last vestiges of civil war.

Ten minutes later Michel was astride of Courtin's pony, saddled and bridled by himself, and taking leave, by a wave of his hand, of Bertha, who returned to the Tinguy cottage, from which she intended to start immediately by a cross-road toward the Touvois forest.

Cathedral of Nantes

XXVI.

MARCHES AND COUNTER-MARCHES.

In spite of the adornment of wind-galls and spavin, with which age and toil had favored Maître Courtin's pony, that brave beast showed energy enough in the amble which served him for a trot to bring Michel into Nantes before nine o'clock at night. His first stopping-place was to be the tavern of the Point du Jour.

He had hardly crossed the pont Bousseau before he began to look about him for the said tavern. Recognizing its sign,--a star lengthened by a ray of the most beautiful yellow ochre painter ever used,--he stopped his pony, or rather the pony of Maître Courtin, before a wooden trough where the horses of the wagoners, who wanted to halt without unharnessing, were watered.

No one appeared at the door of the inn. Forgetting the humble clothes which he wore, and remembering only the alacrity with which the servants at La Logerie welcomed his arrival, Michel rapped impatiently on the trough with the heavy stick

he held in his hand. At the sound a man in his shirt-sleeves came out of the courtyard and advanced to Michel; he wore on his head a blue cotton cap pulled down to his eyes. Michel fancied that what he saw of the face was not unknown to him.

"The devil!" cried the man in a grumbling tone; "are you too much of a lord, my young gars, to take your horse to the stable yourself? However, no matter; you shall be served as well as any."

"Serve me as you please, but answer a question."

"Ask it," said the man, folding his arms.

"I want to see Père Eustache," added Michel, sinking his voice.

Low as the tone was, the man showed signs of annoyance; he looked furtively about him, and though there was no one to be seen but a few children who were gazing with their hands behind their backs in naïve curiosity at the new-comer, he took the horse hastily by the bridle and led him into the courtyard.

"I told you I wanted to see Père Eustache," said Michel, getting off the pony as soon as the man in the blue cap had led him to the shed which served as stable to the hôtel Point du Jour.

"I know that," said the latter. "I heard it, confound you; but I don't keep your Père Eustache in my oat-bin. Besides, before I tell you where to find him I'd like to know where you come from."

"The South."

"Where are you going?"

"To Rosny."

"Very good; then you must go to the church of Saint-Sauveur, and there you will find the man you want. Go; and try not to speak so loud, Monsieur de la Logerie, when you talk in the street--if you want to gain the object of your journey."

"Ah, ha!" cried Michel, somewhat astonished; "so you know me?"

"I should think so!" said the man.

"I must have that horse taken back to its home."

"It shall be done."

Michel put a louis into the man's hand, who seemed delighted with the fee and made him many offers of service; then he boldly went out into the town. When he reached the church of Saint-Sauveur the sexton was in the act of shutting the gates. The lesson the young baron had just received at the gate of the inn bore fruits; Michel waited cautiously and looked about him before putting any questions.

Four or five beggars, before leaving the church porch, where they had asked alms all day of the faithful, were kneeling beneath the organ to say their evening prayer. No doubt Père Eustache was among them; for besides two or three women with their cotton capes, patched with various colors, thrown over their heads, there were three male beggars, each with a holy-water sprinkler in his hand. Either of the three might be the man Michel was in search of; luckily he knew the sign of recognition. He took the branch of holly that was fastened in his hat, which Bertha had told him was the sign by which Père Eustache would know him, and let it drop before the door. Two of the beggars passed without taking the least notice of it; the third, who was a little old man, thin and weakly, whose enormous nose projected boldly beyond a black silk cap, stopped when he saw the holly on the pavement, picked it up, and looked about him uneasily. Michel issued from behind the pillar which concealed him.

Père Eustache (for it was he) cast a sidelong look at the young man; then, without a word, he walked toward the cloister. Michel understood that the holly was not a sufficient sign to the distrustful giver of holy water; after following for about ten yards, he hastened his steps and accosted him, saying:--

"I am from the South."

The beggar stopped.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To Rosny," replied Michel.

The beggar turned round and retraced his steps; this time he went toward the town. A look from a corner of his eye told Michel it was all right. The latter then let his guide pass him and followed him at a distance of five or six paces. They returned past the portal of the church, and soon after, having entered a dark and narrow alley, the beggar stopped for a few seconds before a low door placed in the wall of a garden; then he continued his way.

Michel was about to follow him; but the beggar made him a sign as if to point out the little door, and rapidly disappeared. The young man then saw that Père Eustache had slipped the holly branch he had picked up through the iron ring that served as a knocker.

So this was the end of his journey. He raised the knocker and let it fall. At the sound a small wicket made in the door itself opened and a man's voice was heard asking what was wanted. Michel repeated the passwords, and he was shown into a room on the ground-floor, where a gentleman, whom he recognized as having seen at the château de Souday on the evening when General Dermoncourt ate the supper prepared for Petit-Pierre, and seen again, gun in hand, before the fight at Chêne, was quietly reading a newspaper, sitting before a large fire with his feet on the fender, wrapped in his dressing-gown.

In spite of his very pacific appearance and occupation, a pair of pistols lay within reach of his hand on a table where there were also, laid out for use, pens, ink, and paper. The gentleman recognized Michel at once and rose to receive him.

"I think I have seen you in our ranks, monsieur," he said.

"Yes, monsieur," replied Michel, "the evening before the fight at Chêne."

"And the day of the fight?" asked he of the dressing-gown, smiling.

"I was fighting at La Pénissière, where I was wounded."

The gentleman bowed.

"Will you have the goodness to tell me your name?" he said.

Michel told his name; the gentleman in the dressing-gown consulted a pocket-book, gave signs of satisfaction, and turning to the young man asked:--

"Will you now tell me what has brought you?"

"The wish to see Petit-Pierre, and do her a great service."

"Pardon me, monsieur; but no one can see the person of whom you speak, at least not so easily. You are indeed one of us; I know that you may be relied on so far; but you will readily understand that all going and coming about a retreat which has hitherto been able to keep its secret successfully, would soon attract the attention of the police. Have the kindness, therefore, to tell me your plans, and I will see that you receive an answer."

Michel then related what had passed between himself and his mother; how she had chartered a vessel for his escape, and how the idea had occurred to him that it might be used to put Petit-Pierre in safety. The man in the dressing-gown listened with ever-increasing interest, and as soon as the young baron had given full information he exclaimed:--

"It really seems as though Providence had sent you. It is impossible--no matter what precautions we take to conceal the place where Petit-Pierre is hidden--it is really impossible to escape the police investigations much longer. For the good of the cause, for Petit-Pierre's own sake and for ours, it is much better that she should leave the country; and as the difficulty of chartering a vessel is thus removed, I will at once see Petit-Pierre, explain the circumstances, and receive her orders."

"Shall I go with you?" asked Michel.

"No; your peasant's dress beside me would immediately attract the attention of the police spies, by whom we are surrounded. What inn are you stopping at?"

"The Point du Jour."

"That is where Joseph Picaut is hostler; there is nothing to fear there."

"Ah!" exclaimed Michel, "I knew his face was not unknown to me; but I thought he lived in the open country between the river Boulogne and the forest of Machecoul!"

"You were right; he is only a tavern hostler as occasion demands. Wait there for me. I will go to you in two hours from now,--either alone, or accompanied by Petit-Pierre,--alone, if Petit-Pierre rejects your proposal; with her, if she accepts."

"Are you perfectly sure of that man Picaut?" asked Michel.

"Yes, as we are of ourselves. If there is any fault to find with him it is that he is too zealous. Remember that since Petit-Pierre has been in La Vendée more than six hundred peasants have known at different times of her various hiding-places; and the noblest claim of those poor people to honor, is that not one, poor as he was, thought of betraying her. Let Joseph know that you expect friends, and that he must be on the watch for them. If you merely say to him the words, 'Rue du Château, No. 3,' you will obtain from him, and all connected with the inn, the most absolute and also the most passive obedience."

"Have you any other advice to give me?"

"Perhaps it may be prudent for the persons who will accompany Petit-Pierre to leave the house where she is hidden singly, and go singly to the tavern of the Point du Jour. Ask them to give you a room with a window looking on the quay; have no light in your room, but keep the window open."

"You have forgotten nothing?"

"Nothing. Adieu, monsieur, or rather, au revoir! If we succeed in reaching your vessel safely you will have done an immense service to the cause. As for me, I am in

continual fear. They say enormous sums have been offered for the betrayal of the princess, and I tremble lest some one may yet be tempted to sacrifice her."

Michel was ushered out; but instead of taking him by the door through which he had entered, they took him through an entrance which opened on another street. Thence he rapidly crossed the town and returned to the quay. When he reached the tavern of the Point du Jour he found that Joseph Picaut had engaged a boy to take Courtin's pony back to the farmhouse as Michel had requested.

On entering the stable Michel made Joseph a sign, which the latter understood perfectly; he sent the boy away, postponing the return of the horse till the next day.

"You said you knew me," remarked Michel as soon as they were alone.

"I did more, Monsieur de la Logerie; I called you by your name."

"Well, I'm not sorry to know that we have equal advantages in that respect. I know your name; it is Joseph Picaut."

"I don't say it isn't," said the peasant, with a sly look.

"Are you to be trusted, Joseph?"

"That depends on who trusts me,--blues and reds, no; whites, yes."

"Then you are white?"

Picaut shrugged his shoulders.

"If I were not, should I be here,--I who am condemned to death as you are? That's so; they have done me the honor of a sentence by default. Yes, you and I are equal before the law now."

"And you are here--"

"As hostler, neither more nor less."

"Then take me to the master of the inn."

Picaut woke up the inn-keeper, who was in bed. The latter received Michel with

some distrust; and the young man, feeling there was no time to lose, decided on striking the great blow, and said deliberately the five words:--

"Rue du Château, No. 3."

The words were scarcely heard by the inn-keeper before his distrust disappeared and his whole manner changed. From that moment he and his house were at Michel's disposal. It was now Michel's turn to make inquiries.

"Have you other travellers in the house?"

"Only one."

"Of what kind?"

"The very worst,--a man to fear."

"You know him, then?"

"It is the mayor of La Logerie, Courtin, a vile cur."

"Courtin!" exclaimed Michel. "Courtin here! Are you sure?"

"I don't know him; but Picaut says it is he."

"When did he get here?"

"About fifteen minutes ago."

"Where is he?"

"He has just gone out. He got something to eat and went off immediately, telling me he should not be in till late,--not before two in the morning. He said he had business in Nantes."

"Does he know you knew him?"

"I think not; unless he recognized Joseph Picaut just as Picaut recognized him. But I doubt if he did, for he stood in the light and Joseph kept in the shade."

Michel reflected a moment.

"I don't think Courtin is as bad as you suppose him to be," he said; "but never mind,

it is as well to distrust him, and on no account must he know of my presence in your inn."

Picaut, who had hitherto been standing on the threshold of the door, here came forward and joined in the conversation.

"Oh!" he said, "if he is likely to trouble you, say so; we can settle him so that he shall know nothing, or if he does know anything he shall be made to hold his tongue. I have old scores against him which I've long wanted a pretext to--"

"No, no!" cried Michel, hastily, "Courtin is my farmer. I am under obligations to him which make me anxious that no harm shall happen to him; besides," he hastened to add, seeing the frown on Picaut's brow, "he is not what you think he is."

Joseph Picaut shook his head; but Michel did not notice the gesture.

"Don't trouble yourself," said the inn-keeper. "If he comes in I'll look after him."

"Very good. As for you, Joseph, take the horse on which I came. I want you to do an errand. By the bye, Courtin must not see that horse in the stable; he would certainly recognize it, inasmuch as it is his own beast."

"What next?"

"You know the river, don't you?"

"There's not a corner of the left bank I've not shot over. I know less of the right."

"That's all right; it is the left bank you'll have to follow."

"Follow where?"

"To Couéron. Opposite to the second island, between the two old wrecks, you will see a vessel called the 'Jeune Charles.' Though at anchor its foretopsail will be set; you'll know it by that."

"Trust me to know it."

"Take a boat and row out to her. They'll call to you, 'Who's there?' Answer, 'Belle-Isle en Mer.' Then they'll let you go aboard. You'll give the captain this

handkerchief, just as it is,--that is to say, knotted at three corners,--and you will tell him to be all ready to weigh anchor at one o'clock to-night."

"Is that all?"

"Yes--or rather, no, it is not all. If I am satisfied with you, Picaut, you shall have five pieces of gold such as the one I gave you to-night."

"Well, well," said Joseph Picaut, "leaving out the chance of being hung, it is not such a bad business; and if I can only get a shot now and then at the Blues, or revenge myself on Courtin, I sha'n't regret Maître Jacques and his burrows. What next?"

"How do you mean?"

"Why, after I have done the errand?"

"Then you will hide somewhere on the bank of the river, and wait for us; whistle to let us know where you are. If all goes well imitate a cuckoo; if on the contrary you see anything that ought to make us uneasy, give the owl's cry."

"Ha! Monsieur de la Logerie," said Joseph, "I see you've been well trained. All you've ordered is clear, and seems to me well arranged. It is a pity, though, you haven't a better horse to put between my legs; otherwise the matter could be quickly done."

Joseph Picaut departed on his mission. The inn-keeper then took Michel to a poor-looking room on the first floor, which served as an annex to the dining-room, and had two windows opening on the main-road; then he put himself on the watch for Courtin.

Michel opened one of the windows as agreed upon with the gentleman in the dressing-gown; after which he sat down on a stool, placing himself so that his head could not be seen from the road he was watching.

XXVII.

MICHEL'S LOVE AFFAIRS SEEM TO BE TAKING A HAPPIER TURN.

Michel, under his apparent composure, was really in a state of extreme anxiety. He was about to meet Mary; and, at the mere idea his breast tightened, his heart swelled, his blood coursed in leaps along his veins; he felt himself trembling with emotion. He formed no hopes as to what the result might be, but the firmness which, contrary to all his habits, he had shown in presence of his mother and also of Bertha had answered so well that he now resolved to be equally firm with Mary. He saw very plainly that he had come to a crisis in this singular situation, and that eternal happiness or irreparable misery would result from his present conduct.

He had been on the watch about an hour and a half, following anxiously with his eyes all the human forms which seemed to be approaching the little inn, looking to see if they came toward the door, feeling wretched when they passed it and his hopes vanished, thinking minutes eternities, and wondering whether his heart would not burst in his bosom when he was actually in Mary's presence.

All of a sudden he saw a shadow coming from the direction of the rue du Château, walking rapidly, skirting the house, and making no sound with its motions. By the clothing he recognized a woman; but it could not, of course, be Petit-Pierre, or Mary, for it was not to be supposed that either would venture there alone.

And yet, it seemed to the baron as if the woman were looking up at the house trying to recognize it; next he saw her stop before the inn, and then he heard the three little raps, the signal, struck on the door. With one bound he sprang from his post of observation to the staircase, rushed hastily down, opened the door, and in the woman, closely wrapped in a mantle, he recognized Mary.

Their two names were all the young pair dared to say when they found themselves face to face; then Michel seized the young girl by the arm, guided her through the darkness, and took her to the chamber on the first floor. But scarcely had they entered it, when, falling on his knees, he burst forth:--

"Oh, Mary, Mary! is it really you? Am I not dreaming? I have dreamt so often of this blessèd moment, so often have I tasted this infinite joy in imagination only, that I fancy I am still the plaything of a dream. Mary, my angel, my life, my love, oh! let me hold you to my heart!"

"Michel, my friend," said the young girl, sighing to feel she could not conquer the emotion that now seized upon her, "I, too, am happy that we meet again. But tell me, poor, dear friend, you have been wounded, have you not?"

"Yes, yes; but it was not my wound that made me suffer; it was the misery of being parted from all I love in this world. Oh, Mary! believe me, death was deaf and obstinate, or it would have come at my call."

"Michel, how can you say such things? How can you forget all that my poor Bertha has done for you? We have heard all; and I have only loved and admired my dear sister the more for the devotion she has proved to you at every instant."

But at Bertha's name Michel, who was resolved not to let Mary impose her will upon his any longer, rose abruptly and walked about the room with a step which betrayed his emotion. Mary saw what was passing in his soul and she made one last effort.

"Michel," she said, "I ask you, I conjure you, in the name of all the tears I have shed to your memory, speak to me only as though to a sister; remember that you are soon to become my brother."

"Your brother! I, Mary?" said the young man, shaking his head. "As for that, my decision is made, and firmly made. Never, never, will I be your brother, I swear it!"

"Michel, do you forget that you once swore otherwise?"

"I did not swear it; no! you wrung the promise from me, you wrung it cruelly; you took advantage of the love I bear you to compel me to renounce it. But all that is within me rises against that promise; there's not a fibre in my body that does not refuse to keep it. And I here say to you, Mary, that for two months, ever since we have been parted, I have thought of you only! Buried in the blazing ruins at La

Pénissière and near to death, I thought of you only! Wounded with a ball through my shoulder, which just missed my heart, I thought of you only! Dying of hunger, weariness, and weakness, I thought of you only--of you alone! Bertha is my sister, Mary; you are my beloved, my precious treasure; and you, Mary, you shall be my wife!"

"Oh, my God! how can you say it, Michel; are you mad?"

"I was for a moment, Mary--when I thought I could obey you. But absence, grief, despair, have made another man of me. Count no longer on the poor, weak reed which bent at your breath; whatever you may say or do, you shall be mine, Mary!--because I love you, because you love me, because I will no longer lie to God or to my own heart."

"You forget, Michel," said Mary, "that my resolutions do not change as yours do. I swore to a course of conduct, and I shall keep my oath."

"So be it; then I will leave Bertha forever; Bertha shall never see me again!"

"My friend--"

"Seriously, Mary, for whose sake do you suppose I am here now?"

"You are here to save the princess, to whom we are all devoted, body and soul."

"I am here, Mary, to meet you. Don't think more of my devotion to the princess than it deserves. I am devoted to you, Mary, and to no other. What inspired in my mind the thought of saving Petit-Pierre? My love for you! Should I have thought of it, think you, if it had not been that in saving her I should see you? Don't make me either a hero or a demigod; I am a man, and a man who loves you ardently and is ready to risk his head for you! Why should I care, otherwise, for these quarrels of dynasty against dynasty? What have I to do with the Bourbons of the elder branch or the Bourbons of the younger branch,--I, whose past has nothing to do with either of them; I, who have not a single memory connecting me with theirs? My opinions are--you; my beliefs are--you. If you were for Louis Philippe, I should be for Louis

Philippe. You are for Henri V. and I am for Henri V. Ask for my blood and I shall say, 'There it is, take it!' but don't ask me to lend myself any longer to an impossible state of things."

"What do you mean to do, then?"

"Tell Bertha the truth."

"The truth! impossible! you will never dare to?"

"Mary, I declare to you--"

"No, no!"

"Yes, I declare to you that I shall do it. Every day I am shaking off the swaddling-clothes of my weak youth. There's a vast distance already between me and that child you met in the sunken road, scratched and weeping with fear at the very name and thought of his mother. It is to my love that I owe this new strength. I have borne, without blenching, a look which formerly made me bow my head and bend my knees. I have told all to my mother, and my mother has replied to me, 'I see you are a man; do as you will!' My will is to consecrate my life to you; but I also will that you shall be mine. See, therefore, in what a senseless struggle you have plunged us. I, the husband of Bertha! let us suppose it for a moment; why, there could be no greater misery on earth than that poor creature would endure, not to speak of mine. They told me tales in my infancy of Carrier's 'republican marriages,' when living bodies were tied to dead ones and flung into the Loire. That, Mary, would be our marriage, Bertha's and mine; and you, you would stand by and see our agony! Mary, would you be glad of your work then? No, I am resolved; either I will never see Bertha again, or the first time that I do see her I will tell her how my stupid timidity misled Petit-Pierre, and how courage has always failed me until now to speak the truth; and then--then--no, I will not tell her that I do not love her, but I will tell her that I love you."

"Good God!" cried Mary, "but don't you know, Michel, that if you do that she will

die of it?"

"No, Bertha will not die of it," said the voice of Petit-Pierre, who had entered the room behind them without their hearing her. The two young people turned round hurriedly with a cry. "Bertha," continued Petit-Pierre, "is a noble and courageous girl, who will understand the language you propose to address her, Monsieur de la Logerie, and who will also know how to sacrifice her happiness to that of the sister she loves. But you shall not have the pain of telling her. It is I who did the wrong,--or rather, who made the mistake,--and it is I who will repair it; begging Monsieur Michel," she added, smiling, "to be in future a little more explicit in his confidences."

At the first sound of Petit-Pierre's voice, which had startled them into a cry, the lovers hastily stepped apart from each other; but the princess caught them by the arm, drew them once more together, and joined their hands.

"Love each other without remorse!" she said. "You have both been more generous than any one has the right to expect of our poor human race. Love each other without stint! for blessed are they who have no other ambition in this world."

Mary lowered her eyes, but as she lowered them her hand pressed Michel's. The young man knelt at the feet of the little peasant lad.

"It needs all the happiness you order me to take, to console me for not dying for you," he said in a spasm of gratitude.

"Oh, don't talk of being killed or dying! Alas! I see how useless it is to be killed or to die. Look at my poor Bonneville! What good did all his great devotion do me? No, Monsieur de la Logerie, live for those you love; and you have given me the right to place myself among them! Live for Mary, and--I will take upon myself to declare that Mary will live for you!"

"Ah! madame," cried Michel, "if all Frenchmen had seen you as I have seen you, if they knew you as I know you--"

"I should have some chance of returning in triumph--especially if they were lovers! However, let us, if you please, talk of other things; before dreaming of future triumphs we must think of present retreat. See if our friends have arrived. I must blame you, my brave sentinel, for being so absorbed in Mademoiselle Mary that you failed to make me the concerted signal; and I might have waited in the street till morning if I had not heard your voice through the window; happily, you had left the door open and I was able to get in."

As Petit-Pierre uttered this reproach in a laughing tone two other persons who were to accompany her in her flight arrived; but after a short consultation it was decided that her safety might be endangered by the presence of too many persons, and they stayed behind. Petit-Pierre, Michel, and Mary started alone.

The quay was deserted; the pont Rousseau seemed absolutely solitary. Michel led the way. They crossed the bridge without incident. Michel took a path along the bank; Petit-Pierre and Mary followed him, walking side by side. The night was splendid,--so splendid that they feared to continue along this open way. Michel proposed to take the road to Pèlerin, which ran parallel with the river, but was less exposed than the path along the bank.

Thanks to the moonlight, they could see the river from time to time, like a broad and brilliant silver sheet, marked here and there with wooded islets, their tree-tops clearly defined against the sky. This clearness of the night, though it had its inconveniences, had on the other hand, some advantages. Michel, who served as guide, was sure of not losing his way; and, as they walked along, they could even see the schooner itself at intervals.

When they had passed, or rather gone round the village of Pèlerin, the young baron hid the duchess and Marie in a rocky hollow of the shore, and going to a little distance along the bank he gave the whistle which was to signal Joseph Picaut.

As Joseph did not reply with the owl's cry,--the cry of alarm,--Michel, who, up to

that time had been very anxious, felt more easy. He felt sure that, as he received no answer, the Chouan would soon come to him.

He waited five minutes; nothing stirred. He whistled again, more sharply than before; still nothing answered, no one came. He thought he might have been mistaken as to the place of meeting, and he hurried along the bank. But no! a hundred steps farther took him past the isle of Couéron; and there was no other island within sight where a vessel could lie,--yet the vessel was not visible.

It certainly was the spot agreed upon, and he returned upon his steps. The vessel must be within sight where he had first stopped; but even so, he could not explain to himself Joseph Picaut's absence.

An idea came to him. Had the enormous sum promised to whoever would deliver up the person passing under the name of Petit-Pierre tempted the Chouan, whose cast of countenance had not impressed him favorably? He communicated his suspicions to Petit-Pierre and Mary, who now joined him.

But Petit-Pierre shook her head.

"It is not possible," she said. "If that man had betrayed us we should have been arrested before now; besides, that doesn't explain the absence of the vessel."

"You are right. The captain was to send a boat ashore, and I don't see it."

"Perhaps it is not yet time."

Just then the church clock at Pèlerin struck two, as though it was ordered to make answer to her words.

"There!" said Michel, "it is two o'clock!"

"Was there any fixed hour with the captain?"

"My mother could only act on probabilities, and she told him it might be as late as five o'clock."

"He had, then, no reason to be impatient, for we have got here three hours too soon."

"What shall we do?" asked Michel. "My responsibility is so great I dare not act by myself."

"We must take a boat and look for the ship. As the captain is aware we know his anchorage, very likely he expects us to go to him."

Michel went a few hundred feet toward Pèlerin and found a boat made fast to the shore. Evidently, it had been lately used, for the oars, which were lying in the bottom of it, were still wet. He came back with the news to his companions, asking them to go back into their hiding-place while he crossed the river.

"Do you know how to row?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"I own to you," replied Michel, blushing for his ignorance, "that I am not very good at it."

"Then," said Petit-Pierre, "we will go with you. I will steer the boat; many a time I have done that in the bay of Naples for amusement."

"And I'll help him to row," said Mary. "My sister and I often row over the lake of Grand-Lieu."

All three embarked. When they reached the middle of the river Petit-Pierre, looking forward in the direction of the current, cried out:--

"There she is! there she is!"

"Who? What?" exclaimed Mary and Michel together.

"The ship! the ship! There, don't you see?"

And Petit-Pierre pointed down the river in the direction of Paimb[oe]uf.

"No," said Michel, "that can't be the ship!"

"Why not?"

"Because it is sailing away from us!"

Just then they reached the extremity of the island. Michel jumped ashore, helped his

two companions to land, and ran with all speed to the other side.

"It is our vessel!" he cried, returning. "To the boat! to the boat, and row as fast as we can!"

All three sprang again into the boat; Mary and Michel strained at the oars while Petit-Pierre took the helm. Helped by the current the little boat flew along rapidly; there was still a chance of overtaking the schooner if she kept on her present course.

But presently a black shadow came between their eyes and the lines of the masts and cordage standing out against the sky; she had hoisted her mainsail. Soon another bit of canvas, the foretopsail, rose into the air; the jib followed; and then the "Jeune Charles," profiting by the breeze which was steadily rising, hoisted her other sails, one by one.

Michel took the second oar from Mary's tired hands and bent to the thwarts like a convict on the galleys. Despair had seized him; for in that second of time he had seen all the consequences which would follow on the loss of the schooner. He began to shout and hail her; but Petit-Pierre stopped him, exhorting him to prudence.

"Ah!" she cried, her gayety surmounting all vicissitudes of fortune, "Providence evidently does not choose that I shall leave this glorious land of France!"

"God grant it may be Providence!" said Michel.

"What do you mean by that?" asked Petit-Pierre.

"I fear there is some horrible machination under all this."

"Nonsense, my poor friend; it is only a bit of ill-luck. They mistook the day or the hour, that's all. Besides, how do we know whether we could have slipped through the cruisers at the mouth of the Loire? All's for the best, perhaps."

But Michel was not convinced by Petit-Pierre's reasoning; he continued to lament; talked of throwing himself into the river and swimming to the schooner, which was now gently widening the distance and beginning to disappear in the mists on the

horizon. It was, in fact, with much difficulty that Petit-Pierre succeeded in calming him; perhaps she might not have done so without Mary's help.

Three o'clock was now ringing from the steeples at Couéron; in another hour it would be daylight. There was no time to lose. Michel and Mary took up the oars; they regained the shore and left the boat about where they found it. It then became a question whether they should return to Nantes. This being decided upon, it was most important to get there before daybreak.

Suddenly Michel, as they walked along, stopped and struck his forehead.

"I'm afraid I have committed a great folly," he said.

"What folly?" asked the duchess.

"I ought to have returned to Nantes by the other bank."

"Pooh! all roads are safe if you follow them cautiously; besides, what should we have done with the boat?"

"Left it on the other shore."

"So that the poor fisherman to whom it belongs would have lost a whole day in looking for it! No, no! better take more trouble ourselves than snatch the bread out of the mouth of some poor fellow who has little enough as it is."

They reached the pont Rousseau. Here Petit-Pierre insisted that Michel should let her return to the house alone in company with Mary; but Michel would not consent. Perhaps he was too happy in the sense of Mary's presence; for she, under the influence of Petit-Pierre's promise, replied (with sighs, it is true, but still she replied) to the tender words her lover said to her. For this reason, perhaps, he positively refused to leave them, and all they could induce him to do was to walk behind them, at some distance.

They had just crossed the place du Bouffai when Michel, as he turned the corner of the rue Saint-Sauveur, felt certain that he heard a step behind him. He turned and

saw a man, who, perceiving that he was noticed, darted hastily into a doorway. Michel's first idea was to follow him; but he reflected that if he did so he should lose sight of Petit-Pierre and Mary. He therefore hurried on and overtook them.

"We are followed!" he said to Petit-Pierre.

"Well, let them follow us!" said the duchess, with her usual serenity. "We have plenty of ways of evading them."

Petit-Pierre signed to Michel to follow her up a cross-street, where, after taking about a hundred steps, they reached the end of the little alley which Michel had once before taken, and where he had recognized a door by the branch of holly hung there by Père Eustache.

Petit-Pierre lifted the knocker and struck three blows at varying intervals. At this signal the door opened as though by magic. Petit-Pierre made Mary enter the courtyard and then she entered herself.

"Good!" said Michel. "Now I will see if that man is still watching us."

"No, no!" cried Petit-Pierre, "you are condemned to death. If you forget it, I don't; and as you and I are running the same danger, you will be good enough to take the same precautions. Come in--quick!"

During this time the man whom Michel had seen reading his paper the evening before, appeared on the portico, wearing the same dressing-gown and apparently half asleep. He raised his arms to heaven on seeing Petit-Pierre.

"Never mind! never mind!" said the latter, "don't lose time in lamentation. It is all a failure, and we are followed. Open the door, my dear Pascal!"

He turned to the half-open door behind him.

"No, not the house door," said Petit-Pierre, "the garden door. In ten minutes the house will be surrounded; we must make for the hiding-place at once!"

"Follow me, then."

"We will follow. So sorry to disturb you, my poor Pascal, at such an early hour; and all the more distressed because my visit will force you to come too, if you don't want to be arrested."

The garden door was now open. Before passing through, Michel stretched out his hand to take Mary's. Petit-Pierre saw the action and gently pushed the girl into the young man's arms.

"Come," she said, "kiss him, or, at any rate, let him kiss you! Before me, it is quite permissible; I stand to you as a mother, and I think the poor lad has fully earned it. There! Now go your way, Monsieur de la Logerie, and we will go ours; but remember that the care of my own interests will not prevent me from looking after yours."

"When may I see her again?" said Michel, timidly.

"It will be dangerous, I know that," replied Petit-Pierre; "but after all, they say there's a God who protects both lovers and drunkards, and if so, I'll rely on him. You shall pay one visit at least to the rue du Château, No. 3. I intend, if I can, to return your Mary to you."

So saying, Petit-Pierre gave Michel a hand, which he kissed respectfully; then Petit-Pierre and Mary turned in the direction of the upper town, while Michel took his way back toward the pont Rousseau.

XXVIII.

SHOWING HOW THERE MAY BE FISHERMEN AND FISHERMKN.

Maître Courtin had been very unhappy in mind during the whole evening Madame de la Logerie had compelled him to pass with her. By gluing his ear to the door he had heard every word the baroness had said to her son, and he knew, therefore, of the scheme of the schooner.

Michel's departure would, of course, upset all his projects for the discovery of

Petit-Pierre; consequently, he was little desirous of the honor the baroness did him in taking him home with her. He was, in fact, most anxious to get back to the farmhouse. He hoped, by evoking the image of Mary, to prevent, or at least delay, the flight of his young master; for if the latter departed he lost, of course, the thread by which he expected to penetrate the labyrinth in which Petit-Pierre was hidden.

Unluckily for him, as soon as Madame de la Logerie reached the château she struck another vein of ideas. In taking Courtin from the farmhouse her only idea had been to hide her son's departure and protect him from the farmer's curiosity; but on reaching the château she found the house, occupied for the last few weeks by a band of soldiers, in such deplorable disorder that she forgot, in presence of a devastation which assumed to her eyes the proportions of a catastrophe, all her natural distrust of Courtin, and she kept him with her as the recipient and echo of her lamentations. Her despair, expressed with the energy of conviction, prevented Courtin from leaving her, without some decided pretext, and therefore delayed his return to the farmhouse.

He was too shrewd not to suspect that the baroness had brought him to keep him away from her son; but her despair was so genuine at the sight of her broken china, shattered mirrors, greasy carpets, and her salon transformed into a guard-room and adorned with primitive but most expressive designs, that he began to doubt his first suspicion, and to think that if his young master had really not been cautioned against him it would be an easy matter to join him before he could board the vessel.

It was nine o'clock before the baroness, after shedding a last tear over the filthy defacements of the château, got into her carriage and Courtin was enabled to give the order to the postilion to drive on: "Road to Paris!" No sooner had he done so than he turned round rapidly and ran with all his might toward the farmhouse.

It was empty; the servant told him that Monsieur Michel and Mademoiselle Bertha had been gone two hours, and had taken the road to Nantes.

Courtin at once thought of following them, and ran to the stable to get his pony,--that, too, had gone! In his hurry he had forgotten to ask the servant by what manner of locomotion his young master had started. The recollection of his pony's extremely slow method of progression reassured him somewhat; but, at any rate, he only stopped in his own house long enough to get some money and the insignia of his dignity as mayor; then he started bravely afoot in quest of him whom by this time he regarded as a fugitive and almost as the embezzler of a hundred thousand francs, which his imagination had already discounted through the person of Mary de Souday's lover.

Maître Courtin ran like one who sees the wind whirling away his bank-notes; in fact, he went almost as fast as the wind. But his haste did not prevent him from stopping to make inquiries of every one he passed. The mayor of La Logerie was innately prying at all times, and on this occasion, as may well be supposed, he was not backward with his questions.

At Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu, he was told that his pony had been seen about half-past seven o'clock that evening. He asked who rode it; but he got no satisfactory answer on that point,--the inn-keeper, of whom he inquired, having taken notice only of the obstinacy of the animal in refusing to pass the tavern sign (a branch of holly and three apples saltierwise) where his master usually baited him on the way to Nantes.

A little farther on, however, the farmer was luckier; the rider was described to him so exactly that he could have no doubt about his being the young baron; and he was also told that the traveller was alone. The mayor, a prudent man if ever there was one, supposed that the two young people had parted company out of prudence, meaning to rejoin each other by different roads. Luck was evidently on his side; the pair were parted, and he knew, if he could only meet Michel alone, the game was won.

He felt so sure that the young baron had not deviated from the road and was now in Nantes that when he reached the inn of the Point-du-Jour he did not trouble himself to ask the inn-keeper for further information, which, by the bye, he doubted if the man would give him. He stopped only long enough to eat a mouthful, and then, instead of following Michel into Nantes, he turned back over the pont Rousseau and then to the right, in the direction of Pèlerin. The wily farmer had his plan.

We have already explained the hopes which Courtin had founded on Michel. Mary's lover would sooner or later betray to him, for some personal end, the secret hiding-place of the woman he loved; and as that beloved woman was living with Petit-Pierre, Michel's betrayal of Mary's retreat would also betray the duchess. But if Michel contrived to escape, all Courtin's hopes went with him. Consequently, at any cost Michel must not escape. Now, if Michel did not find the "Jeune Charles" at her anchorage Michel would be forced to remain.

As for Madame de la Logerie, she being well on the road to Paris, it would be some days at least before she could hear that her son had not sailed, and could take other measures to remove him from La Vendée. Courtin was confident that this delay would suffice him to obtain from Michel the clue he sought.

The only difficulty was that he did not know in what way to reach the captain of the "Jeune Charles," the name of the schooner which he had heard the baroness tell to Michel; but--without dreaming of his likeness in this to the greatest man of antiquity--Courtin resolved to run for luck.

Luck did not escape him. When he reached the top of the hill above Couéron he saw, above the poplar-trees on the islet, the masts of the schooner; the foretopsail was hoisted and was flapping to the breeze. Undoubtedly, it was the vessel he was in search of. In the lessening twilight, which was beginning to make all things indistinct, Maître Courtin, glancing along the shore, saw at about ten paces from him a fishing-rod held horizontally over the river with a line at the end, and a cork at the

end of the line which floated on the current.

The rod seemed to come from a small hillock, but the arm that held it was invisible. Maître Courtin was not a man to remain in ignorance of what he wanted to know; he walked straight to the hillock and round it; there he discovered a man crouching in a hollow between two rocks, absorbed in contemplation of the swaying of his float at the will of the current.

The man was dressed as a sailor,--that is, he wore trousers of tarred-cloth and a pea-jacket; on his head was a species of Scotch-cap. A few feet from him the stern of a boat, fastened by its bow to the shore, swayed gently to the wash of the water. The fisherman did not turn his head as Courtin approached him, although the latter took the precaution to cough, and make his cough significant of a desire to enter into conversation. The fisherman not only kept an obstinate silence, but he did not even look Courtin's way.

"It is pretty late to be fishing," remarked the mayor of La Logerie at last.

"That shows you know nothing about it," replied the fisherman, with a contemptuous grimace. "I think, on the contrary, that it is rather too early. Night is the time it is worth while to fish; you can catch something better than the young fry at night."

"Yes; but if it is dark how can you see your float?"

"What matter?" replied the fisherman, shrugging his shoulders. "My night eyes are here," he added, showing the palm of his hand.

"I understand; you mean you feel a bite," said Courtin, sitting down beside him. "I'm fond of fishing myself; and little as you think so, I know a good deal about it."

"You? fishing with a line?" said the other, with a doubtful air.

"No, not that," replied Courtin. "I depopulate the river about La Logerie with nets."

Courtin dropped this hint of his locality, hoping that the fisherman, whom he took to

be a sailor stationed there by the captain of the schooner to take Monsieur Michel de la Logerie on board, would catch it up; but he was mistaken; the man gave no sign of recognizing the name; on the contrary he remarked coolly:--

"You boast of your talent for the great art of fishing, but I don't believe in it."

"Pray why?" asked Courtin. "Have you the monopoly?"

"Because you seem to me, my good sir, to be ignorant of the first principle of that art."

"And what may that principle be?" asked Courtin.

"When you want to catch fish avoid four things."

"What are they?"

"Wind, dogs, women, and chatterers. It is true, I might say three," added the man in the pea-jacket, philosophically, "for women and chatterers are one."

"Pshaw! you'll soon find out that my chattering, as you call it, is not out of season, for I am going to propose to you to earn a couple of francs."

"When I've caught half a dozen fish I shall have earned more than a couple of francs, and amused myself into the bargain."

"Well, I'll go as far as four, or even five francs," continued Courtin; "and you will have the chance to do a service to your neighbor, which counts for something, doesn't it?"

"Come," said the fisherman, "don't beat round the bush; what do you want of me?"

"I want you to take me on board your schooner, the 'Jeune Charles,' the masts of which I see over there beyond the trees."

"The 'Jeune Charles,'" said the sailor, reflectively, "what's the 'Jeune Charles'?"

"Here," said Maître Courtin, giving the fisherman an oil-skin hat he had picked up on the shore, on which appeared the words, in gilt letters: "LE JEUNE CHARLES."

"Well, I admit you must be a fisherman, my friend," said the sailor. "The devil take me if your eyes are not in your fingers, like mine; otherwise you never could have read that in the darkness! Now, then, what have you to do with the 'Jeune Charles'?"

"Didn't I mention something just now that struck your ear?"

"My good man," said the fisherman, "I'm like a well-bred dog; I don't yelp when bitten. Heave your own log and don't trouble yourself about my keel."

"Well, I am Madame la Baronne de la Logerie's farmer."

"What of it?"

"I am sent by her," said Courtin, growing more and more audacious as he went on.

"What of that?" asked the sailor, in the same tone, but more impatiently. "You come from Madame de la Logerie; well, what have you got to say for her?"

"I came to tell you that the thing is a failure; it is all discovered, and you must get away as fast as you can."

"That maybe," replied the fisherman; "but it doesn't concern me. I am only the mate of the 'Jeune Charles;' though I do know enough of the matter to put you aboard and let you talk with the captain."

So saying, he tranquilly wound up his line and threw it into the boat, which he pulled toward him. Making a sign to Courtin to sit down in the stern, he put twenty feet between him and the shore with one stroke of the oars. After rowing five minutes he turned his head and found they were close alongside the "Jeune Charles," which, being in ballast, rose some twelve feet above them out of the water.

At the sound of oars a curiously modulated whistle came from the schooner, to which the mate replied in somewhat the same manner. A figure then appeared in the bows; the boat came up on the starboard side and a rope was thrown to it. The man with the pea-jacket climbed aboard with the agility of a cat, then he hauled up Courtin, who was less used to such nautical scrambling.

XXIX.

INTERROGATORIES AND CONFRONTINGS.

When, to his great joy, the mayor of La Logerie found himself safely on the deck of the vessel, he saw a human form whose features he could not distinguish, so hidden were they in a thick woollen muffler which was wound around the collar of an oil-skin coat; but whom, by the respectful attitude of the cabin-boy, who had summoned him on deck, Courtin took to be the captain of the schooner himself.

"What's all this?" said the latter, addressing the mate and swinging the light of a lantern, which he took from the cabin-boy, full in the face of the new-comer.

"He comes from you know who," replied the mate.

"Nonsense!" returned the captain. "What are your eyes good for if they can't tell the difference between the cut of a young fellow of twenty and an old hulk like that?"

"I am not Monsieur de la Logerie, that's a fact," said Courtin. "I am only his farmer and confidential man."

"Very good; that's something, but not all."

"He has ordered me--"

"In the name of all the porpoises! I don't ask what he ordered you, you miserable land-lubber," cried the captain, squirting a black jet of saliva,--an action which somewhat hindered the explosion of his evident wrath. "I tell you that's something, but not all."

Courtin looked at the captain with an amazed air.

"Don't you understand,--yes or no?" demanded the latter. "If no, say so at once, and you shall be put ashore with the honors you deserve,--and that's a good taste of the cat-o'-nine-tails round your loins."

Courtin now perceived that in all probability Madame de la Logerie had agreed with the captain of the "Jeune Charles" on a password, or sign of recognition; that sign he

did not know. He felt he was lost; all his plans crumbled to naught, his hopes vanished; besides which, caught in a trap like a fox, he would appear in the young master's eyes when he came aboard for what he really was. His only way of escape from the luckless position he had put himself into was to pretend that simplicity of a peasant which sometimes amounts to idiocy and to empty his face of all intelligence.

"Hang it, my dear gentleman," he said, "I don't know a thing more, myself. My good mistress said to me, says she: 'Courtin, my good friend, you know the young baron is condemned to death. I've arranged with a worthy sailor to get him out of France; but we've been denounced by some traitor. Go and tell this to the captain of the "Jeune Charles," which you'll find at anchor opposite Couéron, behind the islands!' and I came just as hard as I could, and that's all I know."

Just then a vigorous "Ahoy!" was given from the bows of the vessel and diverted the captain's mind from the violent reply he was doubtless about to make. He turned to the cabin-boy, who, lantern in hand and mouth open, was listening to the conversation between his master and Courtin.

"What are you doing there, you shirk, booby, whelp?" cried the captain, accompanying his words with a pantomine which--thanks to the rapid evolutions of the young aspirant to a broad pennant--touched him only on the fleshy parts, though it sent him whirling into the gangway. "Is that how you mind your work?" Then, turning to the mate he added: "Don't let any one aboard without knowing him."

But the words were hardly out of his mouth before then new-comer, using the rope which had hoisted Courtin, and which was still hanging, appeared on deck. The captain picked up the lantern which the cabin-boy had dropped in his skurry, and which, providentially, was not extinguished; and then, light in hand, he advanced to his visitor.

"By what right do you come aboard my vessel without hailing me, you!" cried the angry captain, seizing the stranger by the collar.

"I came aboard because I have business with you," replied the other, with the confident air of a man who is sure of his facts.

"What is it, then? Out with it, quick!"

"Let go of me, first. You may be sure I sha'n't get away, as I came of my own accord."

"Ten thousand millions of whales!" cried the captain, "holding you by the collar doesn't choke the words in your throat, does it?"

"But I can't talk when I'm embarrassed!" said the new-comer, without showing the least timidity at the tone of his questioner.

"Captain," said the mate, intervening, "it seems to me, sacredié! that you are mistaken. You ask the fellow who is backing and filling to show his colors, and you are tying the halliards of the other when he wants to run his up."

"True," said the captain, loosening his hold of the new-comer, whom our readers of course know to be Jean Picaut, Michel's real messenger.

The latter now felt in his pocket, pulled out the handkerchief given to him by Michel, and offered it to the captain, who carefully unfolded it and counted the three knots with as much particularity as though they were so much money. Courtin, to whom no one was paying attention, watched the whole scene and lost nothing of it.

"Good!" said the captain; "you are all right. We'll talk presently; but first, I must get rid of that fellow aft. You, Antoine," he added, addressing the mate, "take this one to the steward's pantry and give him a quantum of grog."

The captain returned aft and found Courtin sitting on a coil of rope. The mayor of La Logerie held his head in his hands as if he were paying not the slightest attention to the scene forward. He seemed stupefied, whereas, as we know, he had not lost a word of the conversation between the captain and Joseph Picaut.

"Oh, do have me put ashore, captain!" he said, as soon as he saw the latter

approaching him. "I don't know what's the matter with me; but for the last few minutes I have felt very ill--as if I were going to die!"

"Pooh! if you are like that in a river swell you'll have a hard time of it before we cross the line!"

"Cross the line? good God!"

"Yes, my fine fellow; your conversation strikes me as so agreeable that I sha'n't part company with you. You'll stay aboard of me during the little trip half round the world I'm bound for."

"Stay aboard! what, here?" cried Courtin, feigning more terror than he really felt. "And my farm, and my good mistress, what'll become of them?"

"As for the farm, I'll engage to show you such sights in foreign lands that you can make it a model farm when you get back. And as for your good mistress, I'll replace her advantageously."

"But why, monsieur? What makes you take this sudden resolution to carry me off? Just think, if my stomach turns with this river swell, as you call it, I sha'n't be fit for anything all the way!"

"That will teach you to fool the captain of the 'Jeune Charles,' lubberly thief that you are!"

"But how have I offended you, my worthy captain?"

"Come," said the officer, apparently resolved to cut short the dialogue, "answer plainly; it is your only chance to escape going to the sharks. Who sent you here?"

"I told you," cried Courtin, "it was Madame de la Logerie! and when I tell you that I am her farmer, it is as true as it is that there's a God in heaven!"

"But," said the captain, "if Madame de la Logerie sent you, she must have given you something by which you could be recognized,--a note, a letter, a scrap of paper. If you have nothing to show, you don't come from her; and if you don't come from her,

you are a spy!--in which case, beware! The moment I'm sure of it, I'll treat you as spies should be treated!"

"Ah! my God!" cried Courtin, pretending to be more and more terrified; "I can't allow myself to be so suspected. There, take these; they are letters to me which I happen to have about me; they'll show you I really am Courtin, as I told you; and there's my scarf, as mayor of La Logerie. My God! what can I do to convince you I speak the truth?"

"Your mayor's scarf!" cried the captain. "How is it, you rascal, that if you are a public functionary under oath to the government, how is it, I say, that you are aiding and abetting a man who has borne arms against the government, and is now condemned to death?"

"Ah! my dear monsieur, that's because I am so attached to my masters that my feelings for them are stronger than my sense of duty. Well,--if I must tell you,--it was in my capacity as mayor that I knew the plan was betrayed, and that you were to be boarded to-night. I told Madame de la Logerie of the danger; and it was then she said to me: 'Take that handkerchief and find the captain of the "Jeune Charles"--'"

"She gave you a handkerchief?"

"Yes, upon my word!"

"Where is it?"

"In my pocket."

"Fool, idiot, jackass, give it to me!"

"Give it to you?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I'm willing,--there it is!"

And Courtin slowly drew a handkerchief from his pocket.

"Give it me, you dog!" cried the captain, snatching the handkerchief from Courtin's

hand and convincing himself by a rapid examination that the three knots were really there.

"But, you stupid brute, you idiot, beast!" continued the captain, "didn't Madame de la Logerie tell you to give me that handkerchief?"

"Yes, she told me," replied Courtin, making his expression of face as vacant as possible.

"Then why didn't you give it to me?"

"Hang it!" said Courtin; "when I was hoisted on to the deck I saw you blowing your nose with your fingers, and I said to myself, 'Bless me! if the captain does that he won't need a handkerchief.'"

"Ha!" said the captain, scratching his head, with remains of doubt in his mind, "either you are a clumsy trickster or a downright imbecile. In either case, as there is more chance of your being imbecile, I prefer to settle on that. Now, tell me over again what you are here for, and what the person who sent you told you say to me."

"Well, here's word for word what my good mistress said to me: 'Courtin,' says she, 'I know I can trust you, can't I?' 'Yes, that you can,' says I. 'Well,' says she, 'you must know that my son, whom you've watched over, and nursed, and hidden in your house at the risk of your life, is to escape to-night on board of the "Jeune Charles." But, as I have heard, and as you have told me yourself, the plan is discovered. You have only just time to go and tell the worthy captain that he must not wait for my son, but had better sail away as fast as he can, or he will be arrested this very night for aiding and abetting the escape of a political prisoner--and also, for other things.'"

Maître Courtin added the conclusion of his speech, presuming from the general appearance of the captain of the "Jeune Charles" that he might have other peccadilloes on his conscience than the one in question. Perhaps the mayor's astute mind was not mistaken, for the worthy sailor was somewhat pensive for a few moments.

"Come," he said at last, "follow me."

The farmer passively obeyed; the captain took him to his own cabin, put him in, and double-locked the door. A few minutes later Courtin, who was in darkness and not a little uneasy at the turn that matters were taking, heard a tramp of footsteps on the deck which presently approached the cabin door. The door was unlocked, the captain entered first; he was followed by Joseph Picaut, behind whom came the mate, bearing a lantern.

"Ah, ça!" cried the captain of the 'Jeune Charles,' "now we'll get at the bottom of this matter! We'll unravel the thread which seems to me pretty well tangled up, or, by the hull of my ship, I'll brush the shoulders of both of you with the cat-o'-nine-tails till the devil himself would pity you!"

"As for me, captain, I have said all I have to say!" exclaimed Courtin.

Picaut quivered at the sound of that voice; he had not yet seen his enemy, and was not aware that he was on board the vessel. He made one step forward to convince himself.

"Courtin!" he cried, "the mayor of La Logerie! Captain, if that man knows our secret, we are lost!"

"Who is he, then?" demanded the captain.

"A traitor, a spy, a sneak!"

"The devil he is!" cried the captain. "You needn't tell it me fifty times before I believe it; for there's something sly and false in the fellow's face which doesn't a bit suit me."

"Ha!" continued Joseph Picaut, "you are not mistaken. He's the damnedest cur and lowest scum in the whole Retz district!"

"What have you got to say to that, come now?" said the captain to Courtin.

"He can't say anything; I defy him!" continued Picaut.

Courtin was silent.

"Well, well, I see I shall have to take strong measures to make you speak, my fine fellow!" said the captain, who, thereupon, pulled from his bosom a little silver whistle hanging to a silver chain, and produced therefrom a prolonged and piercing sound. At the signal two sailors entered the cabin.

At sight of them a diabolical smile crossed Courtin's face.

"Good!" said he; "that's just what I wanted before speaking."

Taking the captain by the arm he led him to a corner of the cabin and said a few words in his ear.

"Is that true, actually true?" asked the captain.

"Easy enough to prove it!" replied Courtin.

"You are right there," said the captain.

At a word from him the mate and the two sailors seized Joseph Picaut, pulled off his jacket and tore open his shirt. The captain then came up to him and gave him a smart blow on the shoulder. Instantly the two letters branded on the Chouan when he went to the galleys were visible on his rugged skin.

Picaut had been so suddenly and violently seized and handled by the three men that he had no time to defend himself in the first instance; but he no sooner perceived the object of the assault than he made the most desperate efforts to escape the clutches by which he was held; of course, however, he was mastered by the triple strength against him and could only roar with rage and blaspheme.

"Lash his hands and feet!" cried the captain, judging of the man's honesty by the tell-tale certificate on his shoulder, "and down with him to the hold between two hogsheads!" Then, turning to Maître Courtin, who gave a sigh of relief, "I beg your pardon, my worthy mayor," he said, "for confounding you with a scoundrel of that kind; but don't be uneasy, I'll guarantee that if any one sets fire to your barn within

the next three years it won't be that fellow's hand that applies the match!"

Then, without losing a moment he went on deck, and Courtin, to his great satisfaction, heard him call all hands to get the vessel under way.

Once convinced of the danger he was in, the worthy sailor seemed in so great a hurry to put as much space as possible between the law and himself, that he excused himself to the mayor of La Logerie without even the civility of offering him a glass of brandy, shoved him into the boat with a hasty good-bye, and left him to find his way to the shore as best he could.

Maître Courtin rowed as directly to the bank as the current would let him; and just as the boat's keel touched the sandy shore he saw the "Jeune Charles" slowly moving as sail after sail was hoisted to the breeze.

Courtin then hid himself in the same nook of the rocks where he had found the mate of the vessel fishing, and there he waited.

But not for long; he had hardly been there half an hour before Michel arrived, and he saw, to his great astonishment, that neither of the two women who accompanied him was Bertha. A moment later, and he discovered that they were Mary and Petit-Pierre.

Then, indeed, he congratulated himself on the success of his trick, so wonderfully seconded by chance, and he now bent all his mind to profit by the rare good luck which providence had bestowed upon him.

It will readily be understood that he never lost sight of Michel, Mary, and Petit-Pierre as long as they waited on the shore, and that when the three embarked in the boat to overtake the ship, he watched them with his eyes every inch of their way; that he saw them return and land, and followed them back to Nantes with such precautions that the three fugitives were wholly unaware they were spied upon.

And yet, cautious as Courtin was, it was actually he whom Michel had caught sight of at the corner of the place du Bouffai; it was he who followed the trio to the house

which he saw them enter.

When the door into the courtyard closed after them, and they disappeared from sight, he was certain that he now knew the duchess's hiding-place. He passed before the door, and as he did so, he drew from his pocket a bit of chalk and made a cross upon the wall beside it; then, certain that he had the fish in his net, he felt he had only to draw it in and put his hand on a hundred thousand francs.

XXX.

WE AGAIN MEET THE GENERAL, AND FIND HE IS NOT CHANGED.

Maître Courtin was not a little excited. As the last of the three persons he had followed from Couéron disappeared into the courtyard a vision danced before his eyes, such as he had seen that night on the moor returning from Aigrefeuille,--a vision that seemed to him the most beautiful of all possible visions: he saw before his dazzled eyes the sparkling of a pyramid of coins, casting their adorable gold reflections into the far, far future.

Only, the pyramid was double the size of the one he had then seen: for his first thought on finding the fish in his net was that he should be a monstrous fool if he let that mysterious man at Aigrefeuille share in the benefits of his catch. He resolved on the spot not to let him know of the discovery, but to go himself straight to the authorities of Nantes and reveal the matter to them. To do him justice, however, it must be said that Maître Courtin did think, in this first flush of his hopes, of his young master, and of the fact that he was about to deprive him of liberty, perhaps of life; but he instantly smothered that sentiment of untimely remorse, and, in order not to let his conscience send forth another such cry, he began to run with all his might toward the Prefecture.

He had hardly gone fifty yards before, just as he turned the corner of the rue du Marché, a man, running from the opposite direction, bolted against him and knocked

him to the wall. Courtin gave a cry, not of pain, but amazement, for the man was no other than Monsieur Michel de la Logerie, whom he thought he had left safely behind the green door he had carefully marked with a white cross.

His stupefaction was so great that Michel would certainly have noticed it had he not himself been so preoccupied; but at the moment he was only delighted to see a man he thought to be his friend, and who, as he believed, might now be of use to him.

"Oh, Courtin!" he cried, "tell me, did you come down the rue du Marché?"

"Yes, Monsieur le baron."

"Then you must have met a man running away."

"No, Monsieur le baron."

"Why, yes, you must! It is impossible that you did not see him,--a man who seemed to be on the watch for some one?"

Maître Courtin reddened; but he instantly recovered himself.

"Wait! stop! yes, I did," he said, suddenly resolving to profit by this unexpected chance of averting all suspicion from himself. "There was a man walking in front of me, but I saw him stop at that green door you see down there."

"That's it!" cried Michel, forgetting everything except his desire to discover the man who had followed them. "Courtin, will you give me a proof of your fidelity and devotion? I positively must discover that man. Which way do you think he went?"

"That way," replied Courtin, pointing to the first street his eyes lighted on.

"Come on, then, and follow me."

Michel started to run in the direction Courtin had pointed out; but the latter, as he followed, began to reflect. For an instant he thought of leaving his master to run where he liked, and going himself about the business he was engaged in; but the next instant he thought otherwise and congratulated himself heartily for not following his first idea.

It was evident to his mind that the house had two issues; and as Michel had discovered they were watched, both must have been used to throw the pursuer off the scent. Petit-Pierre had probably gone out as Michel did, by another door. Michel must surely know, by this time, the real retreat where Mary lived with Petit-Pierre; he would therefore stay by Michel, from whom he could undoubtedly obtain the information he wanted; whereas he might lose all by pushing matters too hastily. He therefore resigned himself to the loss of his expected catch and possessed his soul in patience.

He hastened his pace, and rejoined Michel.

"Monsieur le baron," he said, "I must remind you to be cautious. It is getting to be daylight; the streets will soon be full of people, and they will all look at you if you run in this way with your clothes all wet and muddy. If we meet a police-agent he will certainly think it suspicious and arrest you; and what will your mother say then? She has given me so many cautions about you!"

"My mother? why, she thinks me at sea, on my way to England!

"Were you going away?" asked Courtin, with the most innocent air in the world.

"Yes; didn't she tell you so?"

"No, Monsieur de la Logerie," replied the farmer, giving an expression of deep and bitter sadness to his countenance, "no. I see that, in spite of all I have done for you, the baroness distrusts me; and I tell you that cuts me to the heart as a ploughshare cuts into the ground."

"Oh, nonsense! don't trouble about that, my good Courtin; but your change of front has been rather sudden and needs explanation. In fact, when I think of that night you cut the girths of my horse's saddle, I ask myself why you have become so kind and attentive and devoted."

"Oh, hang it, Monsieur Michel! that's easy told. At that time I was fighting for my political opinions; now that all danger of insurrection is over, and I am certain the

government I love can't be overthrown, I don't see anything in Chouans and she-wolves but friends of my master; and it makes me sorry to be so little understood."

"Well," said Michel, "I am going to give you a proof that I appreciate your return to better ideas by confiding to you a secret I believe you have already guessed. Courtin, it is probable that the new Baronne de La Logerie will not be the one who, till now, people think it is."

"You mean you won't marry Mademoiselle de Souday?"

"Quite the contrary; only, my wife's name may be Mary, and not Bertha."

"Ah, I'm glad for you! for you know I helped that on as much as I could; and if I didn't do more it was because you wouldn't let me. Ah, ça! have you seen Mademoiselle Mary since you came to Nantes?"

"Yes, I have seen her; and the few minutes I spent with her sufficed, I hope, to secure my happiness," cried Michel, giving way to the intoxication of his joy. Then he added: "Are you obliged to go back to La Logerie to-night?"

"Monsieur le baron ought to feel that I am at his service," replied Courtin.

"Very good; then you shall see her yourself, Courtin; for to-night I'm to meet her again."

"Where?"

"Where I met you just now."

"Oh, that's good!" said Courtin, his face brightening with a satisfaction equal to that on Michel's own face. "That's good! you don't know how happy I am to have you marry according to your own likings. Faith! if your mother consents, you are right enough to take the one you love. You see, now, I gave you good advice."

And the worthy farmer rubbed his hands as though he were on a pinnacle of satisfaction.

"My good Courtin," said Michel, touched by his farmer's sympathy, "where shall I find you this evening?"

"Where you please."

"Didn't you put up, as I did, at the Point du Jour?"

"Yes, Monsieur le baron."

"Well, then, we can pass the day there. To-night you can go with me when I meet Mary, and keep watch for us."

"But," said Courtin, much embarrassed by a proposal which interfered with all his plans, "I've got a good deal to do in town."

"Well, I'll go with you; it will help me to kill time."

"No, that won't do; my business as mayor will take me to the Prefecture, and you mustn't go there. No, do you go back to the inn and keep quiet, and to-night at ten o'clock I'll be on hand to start,--you as happy as a king, and I very glad of your happiness."

Courtin was most anxious to be rid of Michel for the present. The idea of gaining the whole reward for the capture of Petit-Pierre so filled his mind that he was determined not to leave Nantes without knowing the exact amount offered, and laying some plan to obtain it all himself and not divide it with any one.

Michel yielded to Courtin's reasoning, and giving a glance at his muddy clothing he decided to take leave of him then and there and go back to the tavern.

As soon as his young master had left him Courtin made his way to the quarters of General Dermoncourt. He gave his name to the orderly, and after a few minutes' delay he was shown into the presence of the man he came to see.

The general was a good deal dissatisfied with the turn matters were taking; he had sent to Paris plans of pacification, somewhat like those which had succeeded so well under General Hoche. These plans had not been approved; the general saw the civil

authority encroaching everywhere on the powers which martial law assigned to the military alone; and his susceptibilities as an old soldier, wounded at every turn, together with his patriotic feelings, made him deeply dissatisfied.

"What do you want?" he said to Courtin, looking him over from head to foot.

Courtin bowed as low as he was able.

"General," he said, "perhaps you remember the fair at Montaigu?"

"Parbleu, as if it were yesterday! and especially the night after it. Ha! that expedition would have been a success, and I might have strangled the insurrection at its birth if a scoundrelly keeper hadn't inveigled one of my troopers. By the bye, what was that man's name?"

"Jean Oullier."

"What became of him?"

Courtin could not help turning pale.

"He died," he said.

"The best thing he could do, poor devil; and yet, I'm sorry too,--he was a brave fellow."

"If you remember the man who defeated the affair, general, it seems strange you have forgotten the one who helped you with information."

The general looked at Courtin.

"Jean Oullier was a soldier, a comrade, and soldiers remember each other; the rest--I mean spies and informers--they forget as soon as possible."

"Very well," said Courtin. "Then I shall have to refresh your memory, general, and tell you that I am the man who informed you of Petit-Pierre's hiding-place."

"Oh, are you?" said the general. "Well, what do you want to say now? Speak out, and briefly!"

"I want to do you exactly the same service over again."

"As for that, times are changed, my good friend. We are no longer among the sunken roads of the Retz region, where a tiny foot, a fair skin, and a soft voice are remarkable because they are rare in the country. Here, all the women look like great ladies; and a score of men of your kind have been to me to sell their mare's-nests. My soldiers have been kept on the qui-vive all the time; we have searched a dozen different places, and all to no purpose."

"General, I have a right to expect you to put faith in me, because the information I gave you first was correct."

"Upon my word," muttered the general, in a low tone, "it would be rather pleasant to discover, all by myself, what that man from Paris with his squads of spies, and sneaks, and pimps, and criminal and detective police can't find out. Are you sure of what you say?" he continued, raising his voice.

"I am sure that within twenty-four hours I shall know the street and the number of the house--"

"Then come and see me."

"But, general, I should wish to know--Courtin stopped.

"Know what?" asked the general.

"I have heard talk of reward, and I wish to know--"

"Ah, true!" said the general, looking at Courtin with sovereign contempt. "I forgot, though you are a public functionary, that you are one of those who don't neglect their private interests."

"You said yourself, general, that we were the ones that were soonest forgotten."

"And you want money to take the place of public gratitude? Well, that's logical. So, then, you don't give, my worthy mayor, you sell, you traffic, you trade in human flesh; and to-day, having something to sell, you come to what you think the best

market,--is that it?"

"You have said it. Oh, don't feel embarrassed, general, business is business; and I am not ashamed to attend to mine!"

"So much the better; but I'm not the man you ought to go to. They've sent down a gentleman from Paris who is specially charged to attend to this matter. When you can lay hands on your prey, you had better go to him and sell it."

"So I will, general. But," continued Courtin, "as I did you such a service that first time, don't you feel inclined to give me some reward?"

"My good fellow, if you think I owe you anything I am ready to pay it. Speak out! I'm listening."

"It will be all the easier because I don't ask much."

"Go on."

"Tell me the sum the government has promised to the man who delivers Petit-Pierre into your hands."

"Fifty thousand francs, perhaps; I didn't pay much attention to it, any way."

"Fifty thousand francs!" exclaimed Courtin, stepping back as if he had been struck. "Why, fifty thousand francs is nothing!"

"I agree with you there; it isn't worth while to be infamous for such a sum as that. But you can say that to those it concerns; as for you and me, we have done with each other, I think. Take yourself away. Good-day to you!"

And the general, resuming the work he had laid aside to receive Courtin, paid not the slightest attention to the bows and civilities with which the mayor of La Logerie endeavored to make a proper retreat.

The latter departed far less satisfied in mind than he was when he entered. He had no doubt whatever that the general knew correctly the exact amount of the reward, and he could not reconcile what he had just heard with what the mysterious man at

Aigrefeuille had told him,--unless it might be that the said mysterious man was the agent sent by the government from Paris. He now gave up all idea of acting without him, and he resolved, while practising the utmost caution, to let him know as soon as possible what had happened.

Until now the man had come to Courtin; but the farmer had his address, and was directed to write to him if anything important occurred. Courtin did not write; he went in person. After a good deal of trouble he managed to find, in the lowest quarter of the town, at the farther end of a damp and muddy blind alley full of the sordid booths of rag-pickers and old-clothes men, a tiny shop, where, following certain directions, he asked for Monsieur Hyacinthe. He was told to go up a ladder, and was then shown into a small room, much cleaner and more decent than might have been expected from the general appearance of this lair.

There he found the man from Aigrefeuille, who received him far better than the general had done; and with whom he had a long conference.

XXXI.

COURTIN MEETS WITH ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT.

If the day seemed long to Michel, to Courtin its length was intolerable; he thought that night would never come. And though he felt he ought to keep away from the rue du Marché and the adjacent streets, it was impossible to avoid airing his impatience in their neighborhood.

When evening came, mindful of his engagement with Michel, he returned to the tavern of the Point du Jour. There he found Michel awaiting him eagerly. As soon as the young man saw him he exclaimed:--

"Ah, Courtin, I am thankful to see you. I have discovered the man who followed us last night."

"Hein! what? what did you say?" asked Courtin, making, in spite of himself, a step

backward.

"I have discovered him, I tell you!"

"But the man--who is he?" asked Courtin.

"A man in whom I felt sure I might trust; and you would have trusted him too in my position,--Joseph Picaut."

"Joseph Picaut!" repeated Courtin, feigning astonishment.

"Yes."

"Where did you meet him?"

"At this inn, where he is hostler, or rather, where he is playing the part of hostler."

"Why did he follow you? You can't have had the imprudence to tell him your secret? Ah, young man, young man!" exclaimed Courtin; "they may well say youth and imprudence go together. A former galley-slave!"

"That's the very reason. Don't you know why he was sent to the galleys?"

"Damn it, yes! for highway robbery."

"But it was in the time of the great war. However, that's neither here nor there. I gave him an errand to do."

"If I were to ask you what errand, you'd think me inquisitive; and yet it is my real interest in you that makes me ask, and nothing else."

"Oh! I have no reason for concealing the matter from you. I sent him to let the captain of the 'Jeune Charles' know that I should be on board at three o'clock in the morning. Well, no one has since seen Picaut or the horse--and, by the bye," added the young baron, laughing, "the horse was your pony, my poor Courtin; your pony, which I took from the farm and rode to Nantes."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed Courtin, "then Sweetheart is--"

"Sweetheart is probably lost to you forever."

"Perhaps he has gone back to his stable," said Courtin, who, even in presence of the grand financial horizon which was opening before him, felt a profound regret for the twenty or twenty-five pistoles at which he valued his pony.

"Well, what I want to tell you is, that if, as I suppose, Joseph Picaut followed us he must now be on the watch about the neighborhood."

"What object has he?" inquired Courtin. "If he wanted to deliver you up nothing could have been easier than to bring the gendarmes here."

Michel shook his head.

"No,--do you say no?"

"I say it is not I whom he is after, Courtin; it is not on my account he watched us yesterday."

"Why so?"

"Because the price on my head would not pay him for his treachery."

"But whom else can he be spying on?" said the farmer, calling up all the vacant simplicity he was capable of imprinting on his face and accent.

"A Vendéan leader whom I was anxious to save while making my own escape," replied Michel, beginning to perceive whither Courtin's questions were leading him,--though he was not sorry to admit the latter into half his secret in order to use him when occasion came.

"Ah, ha!" exclaimed Courtin; "and you think he has discovered the hiding-place of the Vendéan leader? That would be a misfortune, Monsieur Michel."

"No; he only got to the outworks, as it were; but I am afraid, now that he is once on the scent, he may have better luck this time."

"This time,--how do you mean?"

"Why, to-night, if he watches us, he will find out I have a meeting with Mademoiselle Mary."

"Mordieu! you're right."

"And that makes me very uneasy," said Michel.

"But I shall be on the watch; and if you are followed I'll whistle in time for you to get away."

"And you?"

Courtin laughed.

"Oh! I--I don't risk anything. My opinions are well-known, thank God; and in my capacity as mayor I can have all the dangerous companions I choose."

"Evil is good sometimes," said Michel, laughing in his turn. "But listen, what time is that?"

"Striking nine from the clock at Bouffai."

"Then, come on, Courtin."

Courtin took his hat, Michel his, and they both went out and were soon at the corner where Michel had met his farmer the night before. The latter stood with his right to the rue du Marché and his left toward the alley into which opened the green door he had marked with a cross.

"Stay there, Courtin," said Michel. "I'll wait at the farther end of this alley; I don't know which way Mary means to come. If she passes you, direct her toward me; if she comes my way, do you move up nearer to us, so as to be ready in case of need."

"Don't trouble about that," said Courtin, as he settled himself on the watch.

Courtin was now at the summit of happiness; his plan had completely succeeded. In one way or another he was certain to come in contact with Mary; Mary was the intimate attendant on Petit-Pierre; he would fellow Mary when she left Michel, and he had no doubt that the young girl, unconscious of being tracked, would herself betray the hiding-place of the princess by going there.

Half-past nine o'clock ringing from all the belfries in Nantes surprised Courtin in the

midst of these reflections. Their metallic vibrations were hardly stilled before he heard a light step coming up on his right; he went in that direction, and saw a young peasant-woman wrapped in a mantle and carrying a package in her hand, whom he recognized to be Mary. The young girl, seeing a strange man apparently on the watch, hesitated. Courtin went up to her and made her recognize him.

"It is all right, Mademoiselle Mary," he said, replying to her relieved gesture; "but I'm not the one you are looking for, am I? You want Monsieur le baron; well, there he is, waiting for you down there."

And he pointed with his finger to the alley. The girl thanked him with a gesture of her head and moved hastily away in the direction given her. As for Courtin, convinced that the interview would be a long one, he sat down, philosophically, on a milestone, prepared to wait. From that milestone, however, he could keep the two young people in sight while dreaming of his coming fortune, which now seemed a certainty,--for he held in Mary one end of the thread that would lead him through the labyrinth; and this time, he vowed, the thread should not break.

But he had scarcely begun to set up the scaffolding of glorious dreams on the golden clouds of his imagination, when the two young people, after exchanging a few sentences, returned in his direction. They passed in front of him; the young baron had Mary on his arm and was carrying the little package the farmer had lately seen in Mary's hand. Michel nodded to him.

"Ho, ho!" thought Courtin, "is it going to be as easy as this? There's absolutely no credit in it." And he followed the lovers on a sign from Michel, keeping at a short distance behind them.

Presently, however, he began to feel a slight uneasiness. Instead of going to the upper town, where Courtin felt instinctively that the princess was hidden, the pair turned down toward the river. The farmer followed their movements with deep anxiety. Soon, however, he began to fancy that Mary had some errand in that

direction, and that Michel was only accompanying her.

Nevertheless, his anxiety again deepened when, on turning the corner of the quay, he saw the young pair making straight for the tavern of the Point du Jour, which they presently entered. Unable to restrain himself any longer he ran hastily forward and overtook the baron.

"Ah, here you are,--just in time!" said Michel.

"What is it?" asked the spy.

"Courtin, my dear fellow, I'm the happiest man on earth!"

"Why so?"

"Quick! saddle me two horses!"

"Two horses?"

"Yes."

"And Mademoiselle Mary? don't you mean to take her back?"

"No, Courtin, I shall carry her off!"

"Where?"

"To Banl[oe]uvre; where we shall make some plan to get away together."

"But will Mademoiselle Mary desert--"

Courtin stopped short; he was about to betray himself. But Michel was much too happy and excited to be distrustful.

"Mademoiselle Mary will not desert any one, my dear Courtin; we are to send Bertha in her place. Don't you see that I can't be the one to tell Bertha I do not love her?"

"Then who will tell her?"

"Don't trouble yourself about that, Courtin; somebody will tell her. Now, quick! saddle those horses!"

"Have you any horses here?"

"No, none of my own; but there are always horses, don't you understand, for those who travel for the good of the cause."

And Michel pushed Courtin toward the stable, where, in fact, two horses were munching their oats as if awaiting the young people.

Just as Michel was putting the saddle on the second horse the master of the inn came down, followed by Mary.

"I come from the South and am going to Rosny," Michel said to him, continuing to saddle one of the horses, while Courtin was saddling, but more slowly, the other. Courtin heard the password, but did not comprehend it.

"Very good," said the master of the inn, nodding his head in sign of intelligence.

Then, as Courtin seemed rather behindhand, he helped him to saddle the other horse and rejoin Michel.

"Monsieur Michel," said Courtin, making a last effort, "why go to Banl[oe]uvre instead of to La Logerie? You would be more comfortable at my house."

Michel questioned Mary by a look.

"Oh! no, no, no!" she said. "Remember, my dear friend," she whispered, "that Bertha will be certain to return there to get news of us, and to know why the vessel was not at the place agreed upon; and I wouldn't for all the world see her before the friend you know of speaks to her. I think I should die of shame and grief if I saw her just now."

At Bertha's name, which he overheard, Courtin raised his head as a horse raises his to the sound of trumpets.

"Mademoiselle does not want to go to La Logerie?" he said.

"But, Mary," said Michel, hesitating.

"What?" asked the girl.

"Who will give your sister the letter that summons her to Nantes?"

"As for that," said Courtin, "it isn't hard to find a messenger. If there is anything you want said or done, Monsieur Michel, I'll undertake it."

Michel hesitated; but he, like Mary, dreaded Bertha's first outbreak of anger. Again he looked at Mary; she replied with an assenting sign.

"Then we will go to Banl[oe]uvre; and you must take the letter," said Michel, giving Courtin a paper. "If you have anything to say to us, Courtin, you will find us there for the present."

"Ah, poor Bertha! poor Bertha!" said Mary, springing on her horse. "How shall I ever console myself for my happiness?"

The two young people were now in their saddles; they made a friendly sign to the master of the inn; Michel commended the letter once more to Courtin's care, and then they both rode away from the tavern of the Point du Jour.

At the end of the pont Rousseau they came near riding over a man who, in spite of the heat of the weather, was wrapped in a sort of mantle which almost hid his face. This sombre apparition alarmed Michel; he quickened his horse's pace and told Mary to do the same. After going about a hundred yards Michel turned round. The stranger had stopped, and, in spite of the darkness, was watching them.

"He is looking at us!" said Michel, feeling instinctively that they had just passed some great danger.

After the unknown man had lost sight of the riders he continued his way to Nantes. At the door of the Point du Jour he stopped, looked about him as if in search of some one, and saw a man reading a letter by the light of a lantern. He went up to the man, who, at the sound of his steps, looked round.

"Ah, it's you!" said Courtin. "Faith, you've just missed getting here too soon; a minute earlier and you would have found yourself in company you wouldn't have

liked."

"Who were those two young people who nearly knocked me over on the bridge?"

"The very ones I mean."

"Well, what's the news,--good, or bad?"

"Both; but more good than bad."

"Is it to be to-night?"

"No; the affair is postponed."

"You mean failed, blunderer!"

Courtin smiled.

"It is true that luck has been against me since yesterday; but no matter! we must be satisfied with walking, not running, that's all. Though to-day is a failure, in view of immediate results, I wouldn't take twenty thousand francs for it."

"Ah, ha! you are sure of that?"

"Yes, very sure. The proof is that I've got hold of something already."

"What?"

"This," said Courtin, showing the letter he had just unsealed and read.

"A letter?"

"A letter."

"What's in it?" said the man in the cloak, putting out his hand to take the paper.

"One moment. We will read it together. I prefer to hold it, because it is intrusted to me for delivery."

"Well, let us read it," said the man.

They both went up to the lantern and read as follows:--

Come to me as soon as possible; you know the passwords.

Your affectionate

Petit-Pierre.

"To whom is that letter addressed?" asked the man in the cloak.

"To Mademoiselle Bertha de Souday."

"Her name is not on the cover, nor at the bottom of the page."

"Because a letter might be lost."

"And you are commissioned to deliver that letter?"

"Yes."

The man gave a second glance at the paper.

"The writing is certainly hers," he said. "Ah! if you had only allowed me to accompany you we should have her by this time."

"What does that matter, if you are sure of her later?"

"Yes, true. When shall I see you again?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"Here, or in the country?"

"At Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu; that is half way between Nantes and my house."

"I hope next time you won't stir me up for nothing."

"I promise you that."

"Try to keep your word; I keep mine. Here's the money. See, I hold it ready, so that you may not have to wait for it."

He opened his wallet and showed the farmer, complacently, a mass of bank-bills amounting probably to a hundred thousand francs.

"Oh," said Courtin, "only paper!"

"Paper, of course, but signed 'Garat;' that is a good signature."

"No matter," said Courtin; "I prefer gold."

"Well, gold you shall have," said the other, replacing the portfolio in his pocket and crossing his mantle over his coat.

If the pair had not been so engrossed in their conversation they would have seen that a peasant had climbed the wall between the street and the courtyard by the help of a cart which stood outside, and was listening to what they said, and gazing at the bank-notes with an air which implied that in Courtin's place he would have been quite satisfied with Garat's signature.

"Very good; then the day after to-morrow at Saint-Philbert," repeated the man in the cloak.

"Day after to-morrow."

"What time?"

"Evening, of course."

"Say seven o'clock. The first comer will wait for the other."

"But you'll bring the money?"

"You mean the gold? yes."

"All right."

"Do you expect to bring the matter to conclusion then?"

"I hope to. It costs nothing to hope."

"Day after to-morrow, at Saint-Philbert, seven o'clock," muttered the peasant on the wall, letting himself gently down into the street. "We'll be there." Then he added with a laugh that sounded terribly like the grinding of teeth: "When a man is branded he ought to earn his label."

XXXII.

THE MARQUIS DE SOUDAY DRAGS FOR OYSTERS AND BRINGS UP

PICAUT.

Bertha, who had left the farmhouse at La Logerie at the same time as Michel, reached, her father after a tramp of about two hours. She found him extraordinarily depressed and utterly disgusted with the hermit's life he was leading in Maître Jacques' warren, though the latter had arranged it for his personal comfort and installed him safely in it.

From a feeling that was purely chivalrous, Monsieur de Souday had not been willing to leave the country so long as Petit-Pierre was in it, and in danger. Therefore, when Bertha came to him with the news of the duchess's probable departure, the old Vendéan gentleman resigned himself, though without heartiness, to follow the advice of General Dermoncourt and depart for the third time to foreign lands.

He and his daughter left the forest of Touvois at once. Maître Jacques, whose hand was now nearly well, though it lacked two fingers, wished to accompany them to the coast and assist in their embarkation.

It was midnight when the three travellers, following the high-road from Machecoul, reached the heights above the valley of Souday. As the marquis looked at the four weathercocks on his four towers, which were shimmering in the moonlight above the sea of verdure which surrounded them, he sighed. Bertha heard him and came nearer to his side.

"What is it, father?" she said. "What are you thinking of?"

"Of many things, my poor child," he answered, shaking his head.

"Don't take gloomy thoughts into your head, father. You are still young and vigorous; you'll see the house again some day."

"Yes," said the marquis, with another sigh, "but--" he stopped, half choking.

"But what?" asked Bertha.

"I shall never see my poor Jean Oullier again."

"Alas!" said the girl.

"Oh, house,--poor house!" said the marquis; "how empty you will seem to me without him!"

Though there was really more of egotism than attachment to his faithful servant in the marquis's regret, if Jean Oullier could have heard that lament it would certainly have touched him deeply.

Bertha resumed the subject.

"Do you know, father," she said, "I can't help fancying, though I am sure I don't know why, that our poor friend, in spite of all they say, is not dead. It seems to me that if he were really dead I should have wept more for him; a secret hope, which I can't explain, comes and stops my tears."

"That's odd," interrupted Maître Jacques; "but I have just the same feeling. No, Jean Oullier is not dead; and I have something better than presumption to go upon,--I saw the body they said was his, and I couldn't recognize it."

"Then what has become of him?" asked the marquis.

"Faith, I don't know!" replied Maître Jacques; "but I keep expecting every day to get news of him."

The marquis sighed again. At this moment they were passing through an angle of the forest. Perhaps he was thinking of the hecatombs of game he and his faithful keeper had piled beneath those verdant arches,--a sight, alas! he might never see again. Perhaps the few words said by Maître Jacques had opened his heart to a renewed hope of recovering his old friend. The latter supposition is the more probable, for he urged the master of rabbits to make most particular inquiries about Jean Oullier's fate, and to let him know the result.

When they reached the seashore the marquis would not wholly conform to the plan laid down by Michel and Bertha for his embarkation. He feared that if they followed

the shore along the bay of Bourgneuf, as agreed upon, they might draw the attention of the coast-guard cutter to the schooner; nothing would induce him to incur the reproach of compromising Petit-Pierre's safety for personal considerations, and he decided that the proper thing to do was for himself and daughter to go out to sea and meet the "Jeune Charles."

Maître Jacques, who had friends and accomplices everywhere, soon found a fisherman who was willing, for the consideration of a few louis, to take them in his boat to the schooner. The little craft was drawn up on the shore. The marquis and Bertha, instructed by Maître Jacques, who was familiar with all smuggling man[oe]uvres, slipped into it and escaped the eyes of the custom-house officers who watched the coast. An hour later the tide floated the boat; the owner and his two sons, who served as crew, got into her and put out to sea.

As it still wanted half an hour till daybreak, the marquis did not wait till the boat was in the offing to come out of his hiding-place in the little deck cabin, where he was even more cribbed and confined than in Maître Jacques' burrow. As soon as the fisherman saw him he began to ask questions.

"You say, monsieur, that the vessel you expect is coming from the mouth of the Loire?"

"Yes," replied the marquis.

"At what hour was she to leave Nantes?"

"From three to five this morning," said Bertha.

The fisherman consulted the wind.

"The wind is southwest," he said; "the tide was high at three o'clock. We ought to meet them between eight and nine; it will take them four hours to get here. Meantime, in order not to attract attention from the coast-guard, we had better throw over some drag-nets and make a pretence of fishing, to explain our being here."

"Make a pretence!" cried the marquis; "why, I should like to fish in good earnest! All my life I have wanted the opportunity for that sport; and faith, as I can't hunt in Machecoul this year, it is a fine compensation which Heaven sends me,--too fine to miss it!"

In spite of Bertha's cautions--for she feared her father's great height might attract attention--the marquis began to work with the fisherman at once.

The net was thrown out and allowed to drag for some time at the bottom of the sea; but before long, the Marquis de Souday, who had valiantly hauled on the ropes to bring the net to the surface, was as delighted as a child with the shining mass of eels, turbot, plaice, skate, and oysters which came up palpitating from the depths of the sea. He at once forgot his griefs, his hopes, his memories; he forgot Souday and the forest of Machecoul, the marches of Saint-Philbert, the great moors; and with them he forgot wild-boars, deer, foxes, hares, partridges, and snipe, and thought only of the shining population with smooth or scaly skins which each throw of the net produced before his eyes.

Daylight came.

Bertha, who till then had sat in the bows absorbed in thought, watching the waves as they parted at the prow of the little vessel and floated away in two phosphorescent furrows,--Bertha now climbed on a coil of rope to examine the horizon.

Through the morning mists, thicker at the mouth of the river than elsewhere, she could see the tall masts and spars of several vessels; but none of them carried the blue pennant by which they were to recognize the "Jeune Charles." She observed this to the fisherman, who assured her, with an oath, that it was impossible for the schooner, if she left Nantes during the night, to have made the open sea already.

The marquis did not give the worthy fisherman and his men much time for discussion, for he was so pleased with his taste of their trade that he allowed no spare time between the throws of the net; and any little pause that occurred he filled

up with questions to the old sailor on the rudiments of nautical science.

It was in the course of this instructive conversation that the fisherman requested him to observe that by throwing the net as a drag they were forced to make long tacks, and that this method of proceeding would end by leading them astray from their post of observation. But the marquis, with that careless indifference which was the basis of his character, paid no attention to the skipper's argument, and continued to fill the hold of the boat with the products of the haul.

The morning went by. It was ten o'clock, and still no vessel approached them. Bertha became very uneasy; she mentioned her fears to her father several times, and at last with so much urgency that the marquis could do no less than consent to go nearer to the mouth of the river. He profited by the man[oe]uvre, however, to make the old sailor teach him how to haul his wind,--that is to say, how to trim his sails so as to make as slight an angle with the keel as the rigging would allow. They were in the most tangled part of the demonstration when Bertha uttered a cry.

She had just seen at a few hundred feet from the boat a large vessel with all sail spread, to which she had hitherto paid no attention, as it did not fly the promised signal, and was now partly hidden by the jib of the boat.

"Look out! look out!" she cried; "there's a ship coming down upon us!"

The fisherman saw in an instant the danger that threatened them, and springing to the helm he wrenched it from the hand of the marquis, then, without observing that he knocked the latter flat on the deck, he managed to get the boat round to windward of the ship, which was close upon them. Rapid as the man[oe]uvre was, he could not prevent a slight collision; the boom of the lugger's mainsail grazed the side of the schooner with a loud noise, her gaff was entangled for a moment with the latter's bowsprit; the boat heeled over, shipped a sea, and if the skipper's rapid man[oe]uvre had not enabled him to catch the wind, she might not have righted as rapidly as she did, or perhaps not have righted at all.

"The devil take that damned coaster!" cried the old fisherman. "Another minute and we should have gone to the bottom in exchange for the fish we've just caught!"

"Go about! go about!" cried the marquis, exasperated by his fall. "After him! the devil take me if I don't board him and ask the captain what he means by such insolence!"

"Do you expect me," said the old sailor, "with my one sail and two poor jibs, to overhaul a craft of that kind? Look at his canvas, the villain!--every stitch set! And see how it draws!"

"Yet we must overtake him!" cried Bertha, running aft. "It is the 'Jeune Charles!'"

And she showed her father a broad, white band at the stern of the other vessel on which could be read, in letters of gold. "LE JEUNE CHARLES."

"Faith, you are right, Bertha!" cried the marquis. "Go about, my friend, go about! But why doesn't he carry the signal agreed upon with Monsieur de la Logerie? And why, instead of steering for the bay of Bourgneuf, is he heading east?"

"Perhaps some accident has happened," said Bertha, turning pale.

"God grant it may not be to Petit-Pierre!" muttered the marquis.

Bertha admired her father's stoicism, but in her heart she murmured: "God grant it may not be to Michel!"

"Never mind!" said the marquis, "we must find out what all this means."

The lugger had meantime gone about, and again catching the wind, began to move rapidly through the water; this man[oe]uvre on a vessel of her size could be done so quickly that the schooner, in spite of her volume of sail, did not get far in advance. The fisherman was able to hail her.

The captain appeared on the poop.

"Are you the 'Jeune Charles' from Nantes?" asked the skipper of the boat, making a trumpet of his two hands.

"What's that to you?" answered the captain of the schooner, whose good humor did not seem to be restored by the certainty of having evaded the clutches of the law.

"I have folks aboard for you!" cried the fisherman.

"More messengers! A thousand devils! I tell you if you bring me any more such fellows like those I have had this night, I'll run you down, you old oyster-dredger, before I let 'em aboard!"

"No, they are passengers! Aren't you looking out for passengers?"

"I'm looking out for a good wind to take me round Cape Finisterre!"

"Let me come alongside," said the fisherman, at Bertha's suggestion.

The captain of the "Jeune Charles" looked at the sea, and not perceiving between himself and the coast anything to warrant apprehension, and desirous, moreover, to know if the passengers asking to come aboard were those for whom his vessel was chartered, he did as the fisherman requested, hauled down his foresail and mainsail and brought-to his vessel sufficiently to throw a line to the lugger and bring her alongside.

"Now, then!" cried the captain, leaning over his bulwarks, "what's all this about?"

"Ask Monsieur de la Logerie to come and speak to us," said Bertha.

"Monsieur de la Logerie is not aboard of me," replied the captain.

"But," returned Bertha, in a troubled voice, "at any rate, you have two ladies, haven't you?"

"Ladies or passengers, I haven't any," said the captain; "except a rascal in irons down in the hold, where he is cursing and swearing fit to take the masts out of the ship and make the bulkhead he's lashed to tremble."

"Good God!" cried Bertha, trembling herself. "Do you know if any accident has happened to the persons who were to embark on your ship?"

"Faith, my pretty young lady," said the captain, "if you would tell me what all this

means you would oblige me greatly; for the devil is in it if I can make out anything about it. Last night two men came on board, both from Monsieur de la Logerie, with two different messages: one ordered me to sail at once; the other told me to stay where I was. One of these men was an honest farmer,--a mayor, I think, for he showed me a bit of a tricolor scarf. It was he who told me to up anchor and be off as fast as I could. The other, who wanted me to stay, was an old galley-slave. I put faith in the most respectable of the two, for, after all, his advice was safest, and I came away."

"My God!" exclaimed Bertha, "it must have been Courtin; some accident has happened to Monsieur de la Logerie!"

"Do you want to see the other man?" asked the captain.

"What man?" said the marquis.

"The one I've got below in irons. You may recognize him, and then we shall get at the truth of this business,--though it is too late now to do any good."

"Too late to get away,--yes, that may be," said the marquis; "but not too late to save our friends if they are in any peril. Show us the man!"

The captain gave an order, and a few seconds later Joseph Picaut was brought on deck. He was still chained and bound; but, in spite of his bonds, he had no sooner caught sight of the coast of La Vendée, which he thought he was fated never to see again, than, without reckoning distance, or the impossibility of swimming, bound as he was, he tried to escape his captors and fling himself into the sea.

This happened on the starboard side forward, so that the passengers in the lugger, which was now to leeward near the stern of the vessel, could not see what happened; but they heard Joseph Picaut's cry and knew that a struggle of some kind was taking place on the schooner. The fisherman pushed his boat along the side of the ship, and they then saw Joseph Picaut struggling in the grasp of four men.

"Let me jump into the water!" he was shouting. "I'd rather die at once than rot in that

hole!"

He might possibly have succeeded in flinging himself overboard if he had not at that instant recognized the faces of the Marquis de Souday and Bertha, who were looking up at him in amazement. "Ah, Monsieur le marquis! ah, Mademoiselle Bertha!" cried Picaut; "you will save me, won't you? It is for executing Monsieur Michel's orders that this brute of a captain treats me as he does; and the lies of that scoundrel Courtin are at the bottom of it."

"Now, then, I want to know the truth about all this," interposed the captain. "If you can relieve me of that blaspheming fellow I shall be glad enough; for I'm not bound for either Botany-Bay or Cayenne."

"Alas!" said Bertha, "it is all true, captain. I don't know what motive the mayor of La Logerie could have had to send you to sea without your passengers; but it is very certain that this man is the one who told you the truth."

"Unbind him, then! Ten thousand cat-o'-nine-tails! let him go hang where he pleases! Now, as for you, what do you want? Are you coming with me, or are you not? It won't cost any more to take you or leave you. I was paid in advance; and to ease my conscience I'd rather like to take somebody."

"Captain," said Bertha, "isn't it possible to go back up the river and let our friends embark to-night as they meant to do last night?"

"Impossible!" replied the captain, shrugging his shoulders. "Think of the custom-house officers and the river-police! No, no; a plan postponed is a plan defeated. Only, I say again, if you wish to use my vessel to get over to England, I am at your service, and it shall cost you nothing."

The marquis looked at his daughter, but she shook her head.

"Thank you, captain, thanks," replied the marquis. "It is impossible."

"Then we had better part company at once," said the captain. "But before we do so,

let me ask you to do me a service."

"What is it?"

"It is about a little note of hand which I will give you, duly signed, requesting you to draw my share of it when you draw your own."

"I'll do anything to please you, captain," said the marquis, affably.

"Very good; then add one hundred lashes on the back of the fellow who fooled me last night, in addition to your own."

"It shall be done," replied the marquis.

"If he has any strength to bear them after he has paid what he owes to me," said a voice.

At the same instant a heavy body fell into the water, and the head of Joseph Picaut was seen about ten paces off, its owner swimming vigorously to the lugger. Once freed of his irons, the Chouan, fearful, no doubt, that some unforeseen circumstance should detain him on the vessel, had plunged head foremost over the schooner's bulwark.

The skipper and the marquis gave him each a hand, and Joseph Picaut clambered into the boat. He was scarcely there before he shouted:--

"Monsieur le marquis, tell that old whale up there that the brand on my shoulder is a cross of honor!"

"Yes, captain, that's true!" cried the marquis. "This peasant was sent to the galleys for doing his duty in the days of the Empire,--his duty as we see it, I mean; and though I don't wholly approve of the means he took, I can declare to you that he has not deserved the treatment you gave him."

"Very well," said the captain, "that's all right. Once, twice, thrice, will you come aboard, or will you not?"

"No, captain, thank you."

"Then good-bye, and better luck."

So saying, the captain signed to the helmsman, the schooner paid off into the wind, the sails were squared again, and the vessel sailed rapidly away, leaving the lugger stationary.

While the old fisherman was working his boat to shore, Bertha and her father held counsel together. In spite of Picaut's explanations (and those explanations were brief, the Chouan having only seen Courtin at the moment when he was seized and bound) they could not understand the motives of the mayor of La Logerie. His conduct, however, was plain enough, and seemed to them extremely suspicious,--although, as Bertha now told her father, he had shown a true devotion to Michel during his illness, and had often expressed to her the utmost attachment to his young master. The marquis, however, was strongly of opinion that his present tortuous behavior concealed some scheme that was not only dangerous to Michel's safety, but to that of their other friends.

As for Picaut, he declared plainly that he lived and breathed for vengeance only, and that if Monsieur de Souday would give him a suit of sailor's clothes to replace those which were torn from his back in the struggles he had gone through, he would start for Nantes the instant he touched land.

The marquis, convinced that Courtin's treachery was in some way connected with Petit-Pierre, wished to go to the town himself; but Bertha, who believed that Michel, finding the escape a failure, would return to the farmhouse at La Logerie, where he would expect her to join him, persuaded her father to put off entering Nantes till he could get some more definite information.

The fisherman landed his passengers at the Pornic point. Picaut, for whose benefit the skipper's son had given up his spencer and his oilskin cap, started across country in a bee-line for Nantes, swearing in every key that Courtin had better look out for himself. But before leaving the marquis he begged him to tell Maître Jacques all the

particulars of his adventure, feeling quite certain that the master of the warren would fraternally assist in his revenge.

It was thus that, thanks to his knowledge of localities, he was able to reach Nantes about nine that evening; and going, naturally, to his old post at the Point du Jour, he overheard a part at least of the conversation between Courtin and the mysterious individual of Aigrefeuille, and saw the money, or rather the bank-bills, which Courtin did not regard as valuable until they were changed into coin.

As for the marquis and his daughter, it was not until nightfall that they ventured, notwithstanding Bertha's impatience, to start for the forest of Touvois; and it was not without actual grief of heart that the old gentleman thought of the happy morning he had spent among the fishes, reflecting that it would have no morrow, and that he was fatally condemned to live, for an indefinite time, like a rat in his hole.

XXXIII.

THAT WHICH HAPPENED IN TWO DWELLINGS.

Maître Jacques was not mistaken in his presentiments; Jean Oullier was living. The ball which Courtin had fired at random into the bush--on chance, as it were--had entered his breast; and when the widow Picaut (the wheels of whose cart had alarmed Courtin and his companion) reached him, she felt sure she was lifting a dead body. With a charitable sentiment, very natural to a peasant-woman, she did not choose that the body of a man for whom her husband had always, in spite of their political differences, expressed the utmost respect, should be left as food for the buzzards and jackals; she was determined that the good Vendéan should lie in holy ground, and she therefore placed him on her cart to take him home.

Only, instead of hiding him in the cart, as she had intended doing, she now laid him on it uncovered, and several of the peasants whom she met on the way stopped to look at and touch the bloody remains of the Marquis de Souday's old keeper. In this

way the news of Jean Oullier's death was spread about the canton; and this was how the marquis and his daughters heard of it, and why Courtin,--who, the next day, wanted to make sure that the man he most feared was no longer living to terrify him,--why Courtin had been deceived and misled like the rest.

It was to the old cottage where she had formerly lived with her husband that Marianne Picaut now took the body. Since Pascal's death she had, in her loneliness, removed to the inn kept by her mother at Saint-Philbert. The cottage was nearer to Machecoul, Jean Oullier's parish, than the inn; to which, had he been living, she intended to take him and keep him safely concealed till he was well.

Just as the cart reached the open crossway we have often mentioned, one road of which led to the dwelling of the two Picaut brothers, it met a man on horseback following the road to Machecoul. This man, who was no other than our old acquaintance, Monsieur Roger, the doctor at Légé, questioned some of the little ragamuffins who, with the persistency and curiosity of their age, were following the cart. When the doctor heard that it contained the body of Jean Oullier, he left his present direction and followed the cart to the Picaut dwelling.

The widow placed Jean Oullier on the bed where Pascal Picaut and the poor Comte de Bonneville had lain side by side. While thus busy in doing him the last offices, and wiping the blood and dust which covered his face and matted his hair, the widow suddenly looked up and saw the doctor.

"Alas! dear Monsieur Roger," she said, "the poor gars is beyond your help, more's the pity. There are so many left on this earth who are not worth their salt that it is doubly sad when one like Jean Oullier is carried off before his time."

The doctor made the widow tell him all she knew of Jean Oullier's death. The presence of her sister-in-law and the children and women who had followed the cart out of curiosity, prevented the widow from relating how she had met him and left him a few hours earlier, full of life, except for his broken ankle; and how, returning

after dark, she heard a pistol-shot and the footsteps of men who were running away, having no doubt murdered him. She merely said that coming from the moor she had found the body on the road.

"Poor, brave man!" said the doctor. "But after all, better such a death--the death of a soldier--than the fate that awaited him had he lived. He was seriously compromised, and if taken, they would have sent him, no doubt, to the cells on Mont Saint-Michel."

As he said the words the doctor went nearer to the body and mechanically took the inert arm to lay it over the breast; but his hand had no sooner come in contact with the flesh than the doctor started.

"What is it?" asked the widow.

"Nothing," replied the doctor, coldly. "The man is dead and only needs the last offices."

"Why did you bring his body here?" said the wife of Joseph Picaut, angrily. "We shall have the Blues down upon us! You know what happened the first time, and can judge by that."

"What does that signify to you," said the widow, "as neither you nor your husband live here any longer?"

"It is the very reason we don't live here," replied Joseph's wife. "We are afraid the Blues may be after us and destroy the little property that is left."

"You would do well to have him recognized before you bury him," interrupted the doctor; "and if that will be any trouble to you I'll undertake to remove the body to the château of the Marquis de Souday, whose physician I am." Then, seizing a moment when the widow passed close beside him, he whispered, "Get rid of these people." This was easy to do, as it was then near midnight. As soon as they were alone the doctor said, going close up to Marianne:--

"Jean Oullier is not dead."

"Not dead?" she cried.

"No. I said nothing before those people, because, in my opinion, it is of the utmost consequence that no one shall come here and disturb you in the care I am sure you will give him."

"God bless you!" said the good woman, joyfully. "If I can help to cure him you may count on me; I'll do it with the greatest happiness, for I shall never forget the friendship my poor husband felt for him. Neither shall I cease to remember that though I was then working against him and his, Jean Oullier wouldn't let me die by the hand of a murderer."

Then, having carefully closed all the shutters and the door of her room, the widow lighted a fire, heated water, and while the doctor examined the wound and tried to discover what, if any, vital organs were involved, she said good-bye to a few old gossips still lingering about the house, saying she was on her way back to Saint-Philbert. Then at the first turn of the road she darted into the woods and returned to the cottage by way of the orchard.

She listened at Joseph Picaut's part of the house; it was closed and she heard no sound. Evidently her sister-in-law and the children had returned to the hiding-place in which they lived while the husband and father continued to keep up, under Maître Jacques, the partisan warfare.

Marianne re-entered her own part of the house by the back door. The doctor had finished dressing the wound: the signs of life in the body were becoming more and more evident. Not only the heart, but the pulses too were beating; and on putting a hand before the lips the breath could be distinctly felt. The widow listened joyfully to what the doctor told her.

"Do you think you can save him?" she asked.

"That's in God's hands," replied the doctor. "All I can say is that no vital organ is

involved, but the loss of blood has been enormous; and I have also found it impossible to extract the ball."

"But," said Marianne, "I have heard that men can be cured and live to old age with a ball in the body."

"So they can," replied the doctor. "But now, how are you going to manage?"

"I did mean to take the poor fellow to Saint-Philbert and hide him there till he died or recovered."

"You can't do that now," said the doctor. "He must have been saved by what we call a clot, which has plugged the artery. The slightest jar now would prove fatal. Besides, in your mother's inn at Saint-Philbert, with so many going and coming, you could never conceal his presence."

"Good God! do you believe that in such a state they would have the cruelty to arrest him?"

"They would not put him in prison, of course; but they would take him to some hospital, and as soon as he recovers they would try him, and condemn him either to death or to the galleys. Jean Oullier is one of those obscure leaders who are so dangerous through their influence on the body of the people that the government will be pitiless toward him. Why don't you confide in your sister-in-law? Jean Oullier and she hold the same opinions."

"You heard what she said?"

"That's true. I see you can't have much confidence in her pity. And yet, God knows, she of all people ought to be merciful to her neighbor, for if her husband were taken it might go far worse with him than with Jean Oullier."

"Yes, I know that," said the widow, in a gloomy voice. "Death is upon them all."

"Well," said the doctor, "the question is, can you hide him here?"

"Here? Yes, of course I can; he will even be safer here than elsewhere, because the

house is thought to be empty. But who would take care of him?"

"Jean Oullier is not a girl or a baby," replied the doctor. "Two or three days hence, after the fever subsides, he can be left alone all day; and I'll promise you to visit him at night."

"Very good; and I'll be here all the time I can without exciting suspicion."

Marianne, with the doctor's help, carried the wounded man into the stable adjoining her room; she bolted the door carefully, placed her own mattress on a pile of straw, and then, appointing to meet the doctor there the following night, and knowing that the sick man would need only a little fresh water at first, she threw herself on a heap of straw beside him and waited patiently till he showed some signs of returning life, either by words or even by a sigh.

The next day she showed herself at Saint-Philbert; and when asked about Jean Oullier, replied that she had followed the advice of her sister-in-law, and fearing to be molested, had taken the dead body back to the moor where she had found it. Then she returned to her house on pretence of putting it in order. The following evening she again closed it carefully and went back to Saint-Philbert before dark, so that all the town might see her. But no sooner was it really night than she returned to Jean Oullier.

She nursed him in this way for three days and nights, shut up with him in the stable, fearing to make the slightest noise that might betray her presence; and though at the end of those three days Jean Oullier was still in the state of torpor which follows great physical commotions and loss of blood, the doctor advised her to stay at home during the day and return to him only at night.

Jean Oullier's wound was so severe that he really hung for a fortnight between life and death; fragments of his clothing carried in by the ball remained in the wound, where they kept up the inflammation, and it was not till Nature herself eliminated them that the doctor, to the widow's great joy, declared him out of danger. The good

woman's care redoubled as soon as she felt he would recover; and though her patient was still weak and could hardly articulate more than a few words, and the signs were few of his being any better, she never failed to spend the night beside him and supply all his wants, taking at the same time the utmost precautions.

In spite of all drawbacks, however, no sooner were the foreign substances expelled from the wound, and a steady and healthful suppuration set up, than he made rapid strides to recovery. As his strength returned he began to worry greatly about those he loved; and he now implored the widow to bring him some news of the Marquis de Souday, Bertha, Mary, and even Michel,--Michel, who had actually triumphed over the old Vendéan's antipathies and conquered a place, however small, in his affections. Marianne did as he requested, and made some inquiries of the royalist travellers who stopped at her mother's inn; and she was soon able to relieve Jean Oullier's mind by telling him that his friends were all living and well; that the marquis was in the forest of Touvois, Bertha and Michel at Courtin's farmhouse, and Mary, in all probability, at Nantes.

But the widow had no sooner uttered the name of Courtin than a total change came over her patient's face; he passed his hand across his forehead as if to clear his thought, and rose in his bed for the first time without assistance. Friendship and tenderness had occupied his first returning thoughts; hatred and thoughts of vengeance now filled his hitherto empty brain, and over-excited it with all the more violence because it had been torpid so long.

To her terror, Marianne Picaut heard Jean Oullier again uttering phrases he had cried out in his fever, and which she had then taken for delirium; she heard him mingle Courtin's name with accusations of treachery and murder and of fabulous sums paid for some crime. Talking thus, her patient became violently excited; with flashing eyes, and in a voice trembling with emotion he implored her to go and find Bertha and bring her to his bedside. The poor woman believed his excitement was caused

by a return of the fever, and was all the more uneasy because the doctor had told her that he should not return for two nights. She nevertheless promised the patient to do as he requested.

On this promise Jean Oullier calmed down, and little by little, overcome with the violence of the emotions he had just passed through, he went to sleep.

The widow, sitting on the straw beside the bed, and conscious of her own fatigue, felt her eyes closing and sleep overtaking her in spite of herself, when, all of a sudden she heard, or fancied she heard, some unusual sound in the courtyard. She listened attentively; it was certainly a man's step on the pavement which surrounded the pile of manure which lay in the yard of the two dwellings. Presently a hand unfastened the latch of the adjoining door, and Marianne heard a voice, which she recognized as that of her brother-in-law, cry out: "This way, this way!" and then the steps went up to Joseph's house.

Marianne knew that the house was empty; this nocturnal visit of her brother-in-law excited her curiosity. She did not doubt it concerned some scheme of violence such as all Chouans cherish traditionally, and she resolved to listen.

She softly raised the shutter of a hole through which the cows, when in the stable, poked their heads to eat the provender laid for them on the floor of the room itself. Through this narrow opening she crawled into her own room; then she climbed noiselessly up the ladder on which the Comte de Bonneville had met his death, entered the garret, which, as we know, was common to the two houses, and there, with her ear to the floor above her brother-in-law's room, listened attentively.

She came into the midst of a conversation already begun.

"Did you see the sum?" said a voice which was not completely unknown to her, though she could not recall the owner of it.

"As plain as I see you," replied Joseph Picaut. "It was all in bank-bills; but he insisted on having it in gold."

"So much the better! for bills, I must say, don't attract me much; it is difficult to get them taken in country places."

"I tell you he is to have gold."

"Good! and where are they to meet?"

"At Saint-Philbert, to-morrow night. You have plenty of time to collect your gars."

"My gars! are you crazy? How many did you say they were?"

"Two; that villain and his companion."

"Well, then, two against two; that's the right kind of war, as Georges Cadoudal of glorious memory used to say."

"But you have only one hand now, Maître Jacques."

"That doesn't matter, if the one hand is a good one. I'll settle the strongest of the pair."

"No, no! that's not in the agreement!"

"What do you mean?"

"I want the mayor for myself."

"You are exacting!"

"Oh, the villain! it will be little enough satisfaction for all he has made me suffer."

"If they have the money you say they have, there'll be enough to compensate you, even if he had sold you on the shambles like a negro. Twenty-five thousand francs! You are not worth all that, my good fellow, I know!"

"Perhaps not; but revenge is what I am after, and I've long wanted to get my hand on him, the damned cur. It was he who caused--"

"Caused what?"

"No matter; I know."

Joseph Picaut's meaning was unintelligible to every one except Marianne. She was

certain that the recollection in the Chouan's mind related to the killing of her poor husband, and a shudder ran through her frame.

"Well," said Joseph's companion, "you shall have your man. But, before undertaking the matter, will you swear that all you have said is true, and that it is really a government agent on whom I am to lay hands? Otherwise, you understand, the affair won't suit me."

"The devil! Do you suppose any private man is rich enough to make presents like that to such a villain? Besides, those fifty thousand francs are only on account; I heard that plainly."

"And you couldn't find out what they were paying such a large sum for?"

"No, but I can guess."

"Tell me."

"It is my opinion, Maître Jacques, that in ridding the earth of that pair of rascals we shall be killing two birds with one stone,--a private matter first, and a political stroke next. But don't be uneasy; I'll know more by to-morrow night, and let you know."

"Sacredié!" exclaimed Maître Jacques; "you make my mouth water. Look here! I retract my word; you can only have your man if I leave a bit of him!"

"Leave a bit of him! what do you mean?"

"Why, before you settle with him I want my share in the conversation."

"Pooh! do you suppose you could get his secret out of him?"

"Yes, if he is once my prisoner."

"He's a sly one!"

"Nonsense. You, who knew the old days, don't you remember how we used to make 'em speak,--those who didn't want to?" said Maître Jacques, with a dangerous look.

"Ha, yes! how we roasted their paws! Faith, you are right; that will serve my vengeance better still," replied Joseph Picaut.

"And then we shall find out why and wherefore the government sends those little gifts of fifty thousand francs, on account, to a country mayor. That knowledge may be worth more to us than the gold we pocket."

"Hey! gold has its value, especially to us who are old offenders and likely to leave our heads on the place du Bouffai. With my share, that is, twenty-five thousand francs, I can get away and live elsewhere."

"You shall do as you like. But come! tell me exactly where your pair are to meet; it is important not to miss them."

"At the inn of Saint-Philbert."

"Then that's all right. Isn't that inn kept by your sister-in-law, or pretty nearly? She shall have her share; it will be in the family."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Joseph. "In the first place she is not one of ours; and besides, she doesn't speak to me since--"

"Since what?"

"My brother's death, there! since you force me to tell you."

"Ah, ha! so it was true, what they said, that if you did not strike the blow, you at least held the candle?"

"Who said that,--who said that?" shouted Joseph Picaut. "Name him, Maître Jacques, and I'll hack him into pieces like that stool!" And suiting the action to the word, he dashed the stool on which he was sitting to the stone hearth and shivered it to fragments.

"Quiet! quiet!" said Maître Jacques; "what's all that to me? You know I never meddle in family affairs. Come back to our own business. You were saying?"

"I was saying, don't mix the matter up with my sister-in-law."

"Then it must be settled in the open country. But where? They'll be sure to come by different roads."

"Yes, but they will go away together. In order to get home, the mayor will have to take the road to Nantes as far as the Tiercet."

"Well, then, let's ambush by the road to Nantes among the reeds; it is a good hiding-place. For my part, I've made more than one good stroke just there."

"So be it. Where shall we meet? I shall leave here to-morrow, before daylight," said Joseph.

"Well, then, meet me at the Ragot crossways in the forest of Machecoul," said the master of warrens.

Joseph agreed to the place and promised to be there. The widow heard him offer Maître Jacques a night's lodging under his roof; but the old Chouan, who had his burrows in every forest of the canton, preferred those asylums to all the houses in the world, if not for comfort, at least for security.

He departed therefore, and all was silent in Joseph's part of the house.

Marianne returned to her stable and found Jean Oullier fast asleep; she did not wake him. The night was far advanced,--so advanced that she had only time to get back to Saint-Philbert before daylight. After arranging, as usual, everything that her patient might want during the morrow, she left the stable through the window.

As she walked thoughtfully along, the hatred she felt to her brother-in-law, because of her firm conviction that he had shared in the death of Pascal, and her deep desire for vengeance, which the loneliness and sufferings of her widowhood made daily more imperious, came over her. It seemed to her that heaven, by calling her providentially to the discovery of Joseph's secret intention of crime, put itself on her side; she believed she would be serving its designs (while satisfying her hatred) in preventing the accomplishment of this crime and the ruin and death of those she considered innocent. Her first idea had been to denounce Maître Jacques and Joseph either to the police or to those they intended to attack; but she now renounced that scheme and resolved to be herself, and all alone, the intermediary between fate and

the victims of the intended crime.

XXXIV.

COURTIN FINGERS AT LAST HIS FIFTY THOUSAND FRANCS.

Petit-Pierre's letter to Bertha had not told Courtin much, except that Petit-Pierre was in Nantes and awaited Bertha. As to her hiding-place and the means of reaching it, the letter left him in the dark.

He did, however, possess an important piece of information in his knowledge of the house with two entrances, through which Michel, Mary, and the duchess had undoubtedly passed. For a moment he thought of continuing his method of spying, and of following Bertha when, in obedience to Petit-Pierre's injunction, she should seek the princess in Nantes; and he also thought of discounting to his profit the distress of the girl's mind when she should discover the true relations of Michel and her sister. But the farmer had now come to doubt the efficacy of the means he had hitherto employed; he felt he might lose, without recovery, his last chance of success, if accident or the vigilance of those he watched were to baffle once more his sagacity and cunning. He therefore decided to try another means and take the initiative.

Was the house which opened on the nameless alley to which we have several times taken the reader, and also on the rue du Marché, actually inhabited? If so, who lived there? Through that person, or persons, might it not be possible to reach Petit-Pierre? Such were the questions which reflection placed before the mind of the mayor of La Logerie.

In order to solve them it was necessary that he should stay in Nantes; and Maître Courtin at once resolved to give up returning to his farm, where it was very probable that Bertha had already gone to meet Michel on learning of the failure of his attempt to escape. He therefore boldly decided on his new course.

The next day, at ten o'clock in the morning, he knocked at the door of the mysterious house; but instead of presenting himself at the door on the alley, he went to that on the rue du Marché,--his intention being to convince himself that the two doors gave entrance to the same house.

When the person who answered the knock had satisfied himself through a little iron grating that the person knocking was alone, he opened, or rather half-opened the door. The two heads now came face to face.

"Where do you come from?" asked the man inside.

Taken aback by the suddenness with which this question was put, Courtin hesitated.

"Pardieu!" he said, "from Touvois."

"No one is expected from there," replied the man, attempting to close the door; but it was not so easy to do this, for Courtin had his foot against it.

A ray of light darted into the farmer's mind; he remembered the words Michel had used to obtain the two horses from the landlord of the Point du Jour, and he felt certain that those words, which he had not understood at the time, were the countersign.

The man continued to push the door; but Courtin held firm.

"Wait, wait!" he said. "When I said I came from Touvois I was only trying to find out if you were in the secret; one can't take too many precautions in these devilish times. Well, there! I don't come from Touvois, I come from the South."

"And where are you going?" asked his questioner, without, however, yielding one inch of the way.

"Where do you expect me to go, if I come from the South, but to Rosny?"

"That's all right," said the servant; "but don't you see, my fine friend, that no one can come in here without showing a white paw?"

"For those who are all white, that isn't difficult."

"Hum! so much the better," said the man, a peasant of Lower Brittany, who was running over the beads of a chaplet in his hand while speaking.

But inasmuch as Courtin had really answered with the proper passwords, he showed him, though with evident reluctance, into a small room, and said, pointing to a chair:--

"Monsieur is engaged just now. I will announce you as soon as he has finished with the person who is now in his office. Sit down,--unless you want to spend the time more usefully."

Courtin saw that he had gained more than he expected. He had hoped to meet some subordinate agent from whom he could extract, either by trickery or corruption, the clues he wanted. When the man who admitted him spoke of announcing him to his master, he felt that the matter was becoming serious, and that he ought to be ready with some tale to meet the necessities of the situation. He refrained from questioning the servant, whose stern and gloomy countenance showed him to be one of those rigid fanatics who are still to be found on the Celtic peninsula. Courtin instantly perceived the tone he ought to take.

"Yes," he said, giving to his countenance a humble and sanctimonious expression, "I will wait Monsieur's leisure and employ the time in prayer. May I take one of those prayer-books?" he added, glancing at the table.

"Don't touch those books if you are what you pretend to be; they are not prayer-books, they are profane books," replied the Breton. "I'll lend you mine," he continued, drawing from the pocket of his embroidered jacket a little book, the cover and edges of which were blackened by time and usage.

The movement he made in carrying his hand to his pocket disclosed the shining handles of two pistols stuck into his wide belt, and Courtin congratulated himself on not having risked any attempt on the fidelity of the Breton, whom he now felt to be a man who would have answered it in some dangerous way.

"Thank you," he said, as he received the book and knelt down with such humility and contrition that the Breton, much edified, removed the hat from his long hair, made the sign of the cross, and closed the door very softly, that he might not trouble the devotions of so saintly a person.

As soon as he was alone, the farmer felt a desire to examine in detail the room in which he found himself; but he was not the man to commit such a blunder as that. He reflected that the Breton's eye might be fixed on him through the keyhole; he therefore controlled himself and remained absorbed in prayer.

Nevertheless, while mumbling his pater-nosters, Courtin's eyes did rove about the floor below him. The room was not more than a dozen feet square, and was separated from an adjoining room by a partition, in which there was a door. This little room was plainly furnished in walnut, and was lighted by a window on the courtyard, the lower panes of which were provided with a very delicate iron grating painted green, which prevented any one on the outside from seeing into the apartment.

He listened attentively to hear if any sound of voices could reach him; but as to this, precautions had doubtless been taken, for though Maître Courtin strained his ears toward the door and toward the chimney, near which he was kneeling, not a sound reached him.

But, as he stooped beneath the chimney-piece to listen better, Courtin caught sight, among the ashes, of several bits of crumpled paper lying in a heap, as if placed there to be burned. These papers tempted him; he dropped his arm, and then, leaning his head against the chimney-piece, he slowly stretched out his hand and took up the papers, one by one. Without changing his position he managed to open them, confident that his movements at that level were hidden from any eye at the keyhole by a table in the middle of the room.

He had examined and thrown away as of no interest several of these papers, when on

the back of one (among a number of insignificant bills which he was about to crumple up on his knee and return to the ashes) he spied certain words in a delicate and refined handwriting, which struck him; they were as follows:--

"If you feel uneasy, come at once. Our friend desires me to say that there is an empty room in our retreat which is at your service."

The note was signed M. de S. Evidently, as the initials indicated, it was signed by Mary de Souday. Courtin put it carefully away in his pocket; his peasant craftiness had instantly perceived the possible good he might get out of its possession.

He continued his investigations, however, and came to the conclusion, from sundry bills for large payments, that the owner or lessee of the house must be intrusted with the management of the duchess's money-matters. Just then he heard the sound of voices and of steps in the passage. He rose hastily and went to the window. Through the grating we have mentioned he saw the servant escorting a gentleman to the door. The latter held in his hand an empty money-bag, and before leaving the premises he folded it up and put it in his pocket. Until then Courtin had not been able to see his face; but, just as he passed in front of the servant to go out of the door, Courtin recognized Maître Loriot.

"Ah, ha!" he said. "So he's in it, is he? It is he who brings them money. Decidedly, I made a good stroke in coming here."

He returned to his place near the chimney, thinking that the time for his interview had probably arrived. When the Breton opened the door he found the visitor so absorbed in his orisons that he never stirred. The peasant went to him, touched him gently on the shoulder, and asked him to follow him; Courtin obeyed, after ending his prayer as he began it, by making the sign of the cross, which the Breton imitated.

The farmer was now shown into the same room where Maître Pascal had formerly received Michel; on this occasion, however, Maître Pascal was much more seriously employed. Before him was a table covered with papers, and Courtin fancied he saw

the shining of various gold-pieces among a pile of opened letters, which seemed to have been lately heaped there as if to hide them.

Maître Pascal intercepted the farmer's glance; at first he was not displeased, attributing it to nothing more than the inquisitive interest which the peasantry always attach to the sight of gold and silver. Nevertheless, as he did not choose to allow that curiosity to go too far, he pretended to search for something in a drawer, and in order to do so threw up an end of the long green table-cloth so that it covered the pile of papers effectually. Then, turning to his visitor he said roughly:--

"What do you want?"

"To fulfil an errand."

"Who sends you?"

"Monsieur de la Logerie."

"Ah, do you belong to that young man?"

"I am his farmer, his confidential man."

"Then say what you have to say."

"But I don't know that I can do that," said Courtin, boldly.

"Why not?"

"Because you are not the person to whom Monsieur de la Logerie sent me."

"Who was it, then?" asked Maître Pascal, frowning with some uneasiness.

"Another person, to whom you were to take me."

"I don't know what you mean," returned Maître Pascal, unable to conceal the impatience he felt at what he supposed to be an unpardonable piece of heedlessness on Michel's part.

Courtin, noticing his annoyance, saw that he had gone too far; but it was dangerous to beat too rapid a retreat.

"Come," said Pascal, "will you, or will you not tell me what you are here for? I have no time to waste."

"Bless me! I don't know what to do, my good gentleman," said Courtin. "I love my young master enough to jump into the fire for him. When he says to me 'do this' or 'do that,' I always try to execute his orders just as he gives them, so as to deserve his confidence; and he did not tell me to give his message to you."

"What is your name, my good man?"

"Courtin, at your service."

"What parish do you belong to?"

"La Logerie."

Maître Pascal took up a note-book, and looked it over for a few moments; then he fixed an investigating and distrustful eye on Courtin.

"You are the mayor of La Logerie?" he asked.

"Yes, since 1830." Then, observing Maître Pascal's increasing coldness, "It was my mistress, Madame la baronne, who had me nominated," he added.

"Did Monsieur de la Logerie only give you a verbal message for the person to whom he sent you?"

"Yes; I have a bit of a letter here, but it isn't for that person."

"Can I see that bit of a letter?"

"Of course; there's no secret in it, because it isn't sealed."

And Courtin held out to Maître Pascal the paper Michel had given him for Bertha, in which Petit-Pierre begged her to come to Nantes.

"How happens it that this paper is still in your hands?" asked Maître Pascal. "It is dated some days ago."

"Because one can't do everything all at once; and I am not going back our way just

yet, and till I do I can't meet the person to whom I'm to give the note."

Maître Pascal's eyes had never left the farmer's face from the moment he had failed to find Courtin's name on the list of those whose loyalty could be trusted. The latter was now affecting the same idiotic simplicity that had succeeded so well with the captain of the "Jeune Charles."

"Come, my good man," said Maître Pascal, "it is impossible for you to give your message to any one but me. Do so if you think proper; if not, go back to your master, and tell him he must come himself."

"I sha'n't do that, my dear monsieur," replied Courtin. "My master is condemned to death, and I don't wish to say a word to bring him back to Nantes. He is better off with us. I'll tell the whole thing to you; you can do what you think best about it, and if Monsieur is not pleased, he may scold me; I'd rather that than bring him here."

This artless expression of devotion reconciled Maître Pascal in a degree to the farmer, whose first answer had seriously alarmed him.

"Go on, my good man, and I will answer for it your master will not blame you."

"The matter is soon told: Monsieur Michel wants me to tell you, or rather tell Monsieur Petit-Pierre,--for that is the name of the person he sent me to find,--"

"Go on!" said Maître Pascal, smiling.

"I was to tell him that he had discovered the man who ordered the ship to sail a few moments before Monsieur Petit-Pierre, Mademoiselle Mary, and himself reached the rendezvous."

"And who may that man be?"

"One named Joseph Picaut, lately hostler at the Point du Jour."

"True; the man whom we placed there has disappeared since yesterday," said Maître Pascal. "Go on, Courtin!"

"I was to warn Monsieur Petit-Pierre to beware of this Picaut in town, and to say he

would look out for him in the country. And that's all."

"Very good; thank Monsieur de la Logerie for his information. And now that I have received it, I can assure you that it was intended for me."

"That's enough to satisfy me," said Courtin, rising.

Maître Pascal accompanied the farmer as he went out with much civility, and did for him what Courtin had noticed that he did not do for Maître Loriot,--he followed him to the very door of the street.

Courtin was too wily himself to mistake the meaning of these attentions; and he was not surprised, when he had gone about twenty paces from the house, to hear the door open and close behind him. He did not turn round; but, certain that he was followed, he walked slowly, like a man at leisure, stopping to gaze like a countryman into all the shop-windows, reading the posters on the walls, and carefully avoiding everything that might confirm the suspicions he had not been able to destroy in Maître Pascal's mind. This constraint was no annoyance to him; in fact, he enjoyed his morning, feeling that he was on the verge of obtaining the reward of his trouble.

Just as he arrived in front of the hôtel des Colonies he saw Maître Loriot under the portico, talking to a stranger. Courtin, affecting great surprise, went straight to the notary, and inquired how he came to be at Nantes when it was not the market-day. Then he asked the notary if he would give him a seat in his cabriolet back to Légé, to which the latter very willingly assented, saying, however, that he still had a few errands to do and should not be ready to leave Nantes for four or five hours, and advising Courtin to wait in some café.

Now, a café was a luxury the farmer would not allow himself under any circumstances, and that day least of all. In his religious fervor he went devoutly to church, where he assisted at vespers said for the canons; after which he returned to Maître Loriot's hotel, sat down on a stone bench under a yew-tree, and went to sleep, or pretended to do so, in the calm and peaceful slumber of an easy conscience.

Two hours later the notary returned; he told Courtin that unexpected business would detain him at Nantes, and that he could not start for Légé before ten o'clock. This did not suit the farmer, whose appointment with Monsieur Hyacinthe (the name, it will be remembered, of the mysterious man of Aigrefeuille) was from seven to eight o'clock at Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu. He therefore told Monsieur Loriot that he must give up the honor of his company and go on foot, for the sun was getting low and he wanted to get home before night-fall.

When Courtin, sitting on the bench, had first opened his eyes, he saw the Breton servant watching him; he now paid no attention to him and seemed not to see him as he started to keep his rendezvous. The Breton followed him over the river; but Courtin never once betrayed, by looking backward, the usual uneasiness of those whose consciences are ill at ease. The result was that the Breton returned to his master and assured him that it was a great mistake to distrust the worthy peasant, who spent his leisure hours in the most innocent amusements and pious practices; so that even Maître Pascal, cautious as he was, began to think Michel less to blame for confiding in so faithful a servant.

XXXV.

THE TAVERN OF THE GRAND SAINT-JACQUES.

One word on the lay of the land about the village of Saint-Philbert. Without this little topographical preface, which shall be short, like all our prefaces, it would be difficult for our readers to follow in detail the scenes we are now about to lay before their eyes.

The village of Saint-Philbert stands at the angle formed by the river Boulogne as it falls into the lake of Grand-Lieu; the village is on the left bank of the river. The church and the principal houses are somewhere about fifteen hundred yards from the lake; the main, in fact the only street follows the river-bank, and the lower it goes to the lake, the fewer and poorer the houses; so that when the vast blue sheet of water,

framed in reeds, which forms the terminus of the street is reached, there is nothing to be seen but a few thatched huts occupied by men who are employed in the fisheries.

Yet there is, or rather was at the time of which we write, one exception to this decadence of the lower end of the village street. About thirty steps away from the huts we have mentioned stood a brick and stone house, with red roofs and green shutters, surrounded with hay and straw stacks, like sentinels round a camp, and peopled with a world of cows, sheep, chickens, ducks,--all either lowing and bleating in the stables or clucking and gabbling before the door as they preened themselves in the dust of the road.

The road served as the courtyard of the house, which, if deprived of that useful resort, could still fall back upon its gardens, which are simply the most magnificent and productive of all the country round. From the road the crests of the fruit-trees can be seen above the farm-buildings, covered in spring-time with the rosy snow of their blossoms; in summer, with fruits of all kinds; and during nine months of the year, with verdure. These trees spread in a semi-circle about a thousand feet southerly, to a little hill crowned with ruins which looks down upon the waters of the lake of Grand-Lieu.

This house is the inn kept by the mother of Marianne Picaut. These ruins are those of the château de Saint-Philbert-de-Grand-Lieu.

The high walls and gigantic towers of this the most celebrated baronial castle in the province, built to hold the country in check and command the waters of the lake, the gloomy arches that once echoed to the clanking spurs of Comte Gilles de Retz as he trod its paved floors, meditating on those monstrous debauches which surpassed all that Rome in its decadence ever invented,--now, dismantled, dilapidated, swathed in ivy, overgrown with gilliflowers, crumbling on all sides, have descended, from degradation to degradation, to the lowest of all; grand, savage, terrible as they once were, they are now humbly utilitarian; they have been reduced at last to making a

living for a family of peasants, descendants of poor serfs who in former days regarded them, no doubt, with fear and trembling.

These ruins shelter the gardens from the northwest wind, so fatal to fertility, and make this little corner of earth a perfect Eldorado, where all things grow and prosper,--from the native pear to the grape, the fruiting sorbus to the fig-tree.

But this was not the only service which the old feudal castle did to its new proprietors. In the lower halls, cooled by currents of impetuous air, they kept their fruits and garden products, preserving them in good condition after the ordinary season had passed; thus doubling their value. And besides this source of profit, the dungeons, where Gilles de Retz had piled his victims, were now a dairy, the butter and cheese of which were justly celebrated. This is what time has done with the Titanic works of the former lords of Saint-Philbert.

One word now on what they once were.

The château de Saint-Philbert consisted originally of a vast parallelogram enclosed with walls, bathed on one side by the waters of the lake and protected on the other side by a broad moat hollowed in the rock. Four square towers flanked the four corners of this enormous mass of stone; a citadel in the centre, with its portcullis bristling with spikes, defended the entrance. Opposite to the citadel, on the other side of the castle, a fifth square tower, taller and more imposing than the rest, commanded the whole structure, and the lake, which surrounded it on three sides.

With the exception of this fifth tower and the citadel, or keep, all the rest of the fortress, walls and main-buildings, had pretty much crumbled away, and time had not entirely spared the great tower itself. The rotten beams of the first floor, unable to support the stones which year by year slid down upon them in greater numbers, had sunk to the ground-floor, raising it by over a foot, leaving no other ceiling in the tower than the rafters of the roof.

It was in this lower room that the grandfather of the widow Picaut had principally

kept his fruit, and the walls were lined with shelves on which the good man spread in winter the various products of his garden. The doors and windows of this portion of the tower had remained more or less intact, and at one of these windows could still be seen an iron bar covered with rust, which undoubtedly dated from the days of Comte Gilles.

The other towers and the walls of the main building were completely in ruins; the masses of masonry which had fallen had rolled either into the courtyard, which they obstructed, or into the lake, which covered them with its reeds at all times and its foam in stormy weather. The citadel, about as intact as the great tower, was crowded with an enormous mass of ivy which took the place of a roof; in it were two small chambers, which, notwithstanding the colossal appearance of the structure, were not more than eight or ten feet square, owing to the enormous thickness of the walls.

The inner courtyard, used in feudal days as the barrack-ground of the castle's defenders, obstructed by the rubbish which time had heaped there,--fragments of columns and battlements, broken arches, dilapidated statues,--was now impassable. A narrow path led to the great tower; another, less carefully cleared, led to a remaining vestige of the east tower, where a stone staircase was actually left standing, by which all persons desirous of enjoying a beautiful view could, after a series of acrobatic feats, reach the platform of the main tower by following a gallery which ran along the wall like those Alpine paths cut on the face of the rock between precipice and mountain.

It is unnecessary to say that, except during the period of the year when the fruits were stored there, no one frequented these ruins of the château de Saint-Philbert. At that period a watchman was stationed there, who slept in the keep; all the rest of the year the gates of the tower were locked and the place was abandoned to lovers of historical reminiscences, and to the boys of the village, who pervaded the old ruins, where they found nests to pillage, flowers to pick, dangers to brave,--all things of

eager attraction to children.

It was in these ruins that Courtin had appointed to meet Monsieur Hyacinthe. He knew they would be absolutely deserted at the hour he named to his associate, inasmuch as the lingering ill-repute of the place drove away at night all the village urchins who, as long as the sun was above the horizon, scampered like lizards among the dentelled ridges of the old ruin.

The mayor of La Logerie left Nantes about five o'clock; he was on foot, and yet he walked so fast that he was an hour earlier than he needed to be when he crossed the bridge which led into the village of Saint-Philbert. Maître Courtin was somewhat of a personage in the village. To see him desert the Grand Saint-Jacques (the inn before which he usually tied his pony Sweetheart) in favor of the Pomme de Pin, the tavern kept by the mother of the widow Picaut, would have been an event which, as he very well knew, would have set the village tongues a wagging. He was so convinced of this that, although, being deprived of his pony and never taking any refreshment except what was offered to him, it seemed a useless matter to go to an inn at all, the mayor of La Logerie stopped, as usual, before the door of the Grand Saint-Jacques, where he held with the inhabitants of the village (who, since the double defeat at Chêne and La Pénissière, had drawn closer to him) a conversation which, under present circumstances, was not unimportant to him.

"Maître Courtin," said one man, "is it true what they say?"

"What do they say, Matthieu?" replied Courtin. "Tell me; I'd like to know."

"Hang it! they say you've turned your coat, and nothing can be seen but the lining of it,--so that what was blue is now white."

"Well done!" said Courtin; "if that isn't nonsense!"

"You've given occasion for it, my man; and since your young master went over to the Whites it is a fact that you've stopped gabbling against them as you once did."

"Gabbling!" exclaimed Courtin, with his slyest look, "what's the good of that? I have

something better to do than gabble, and--and you'll hear of it soon, my lad."

"So much the better! for, don't you see, Maître Courtin, all these public troubles are death to business. If patriots can't agree, they'll die of poverty and hunger instead of being shot like our forefathers. Whereas, if we could only get rid of those troublesome gars who roam the forests about here and make trouble, business would soon pick up, and that's all we want."

"Roaming?" repeated Courtin, "who are roaming? Seems to me that none but ghosts are left to roam now."

"Pooh! there's plenty of them left. It isn't ten minutes since I saw the boldest of them go by, gun in hand, pistols in his belt,--just as if there weren't any red-breeches in the land."

"Who was he?"

"Joseph Picaut, by God!--the man who killed his brother."

"Joseph Picaut! here?" exclaimed Courtin, turning livid. "It isn't possible!"

"It's as true as you live, Maître Courtin! as true as there is a God! He did have on a sailor's hat and jacket, but never mind, I recognized him all the same."

Maître Courtin reflected a moment. The plan he had laid in his head, which rested on the existence of the house with two issues, and the daily intercourse of Maître Pascal with Petit-Pierre, might fail; in which case, he had Bertha to fall back upon as a last resource. There would then remain, in order to discover Petit-Pierre's retreat, one means open to him,--the means he had already failed in with Mary,--namely, to follow Bertha when she went to Nantes. If Bertha saw Joseph Picaut all was lost; still worse would it be if Bertha put Picaut in communication with Michel! Then the part he had played in stopping the embarkation would be disclosed to the young baron, and the farmer was a ruined man.

Courtin asked for pen, ink, and paper, wrote a few lines, and gave them to the man

who had spoken to him.

"Here, gars Matthieu," he said, "here's a proof that I'm a patriot and that I don't turn round like a weathercock to the wind of any master. You accuse me of following my young landlord in all his performances; well, the fact is that I have only known within the last hour where he is hiding, and now I am going to lay hands on him. The more occasion I have to destroy the enemies of the nation, the better pleased I am, and the more I hasten to take advantage of it; and what's more, I do it without inquiring whether it is to my advantage or disadvantage, or whether the persons I denounce are my friends or not."

The peasant, who was a double-dyed Blue, shook Courtin's hand heartily.

"Are your legs good?" continued the latter.

"I should think so!" said the peasant.

"Well, then, carry that to Nantes at once; and as I have a good many haystacks out, I rely on you to keep my secret; for, you understand, if I'm suspected of having the young baron arrested, those stacks will never get into my barn."

The peasant made a promise of secrecy, and Courtin, as it was now dusk, left the inn on the right, made a tack across the fields, and then, returning cautiously on his steps, took a path which led to the ruins of Saint-Philbert.

He reached them by the shore of the lake, followed the moat, and entered the courtyard by a stone bridge which had long replaced the portcullis that gave entrance to the citadel.

As he entered the courtyard he whistled softly. At the signal a man sitting on the fallen masonry rose and came to him. The man was Monsieur Hyacinthe.

"Is that you?" he said, as he approached with some caution.

"Yes," said Courtin, "don't be alarmed."

"What news?"

"Good; but this is not the place to tell it."

"Why not?"

"Because it is as dark as a pocket. I almost walked over you before I knew it. A man might be hidden here at our feet and we not be the wiser. Come! the affair is in too good shape just now to risk anything."

"Very good; but where will you find a lonelier place than this?"

"We must find one. If I knew of an open desert in the neighborhood I'd go there and speak low. But, for want of a desert, we'll find some place where we are certain of being alone."

"Go on; I'll follow you."

XXXVI.

JUDAS AND JUDAS.

It was toward the great middle tower that Courtin now guided his companion, not without stopping once or twice to listen; for, whether it was reality or fancy, the mayor of La Logerie thought he saw shadows gliding near them. But as Monsieur Hyacinthe reassured him after every pause, he ended by thinking it an effect of imagination; and when they reached the tower he opened a door, entered first, took from his pocket a wax candle and a sulphur match, lighted the candle and carried it cautiously into all the corners and angularities of the room to make sure that no one was hidden there.

A door, cut in the wall to the right and partly broken down by the rubbish of the ceiling, excited his fears and also his curiosity. He pushed it open and found himself in front of a yawning space from which a damp vapor was rising.

"Look there!" said Monsieur Hyacinthe, who followed him, showing Courtin a wide breach in the outer wall, through which they could see the lake sparkling in the moonlight. "Look at that!"

"I see it plain enough," said Courtin, laughing. "Yes, Mère Chompré's dairy needs repairing; since I was here last the hole in that wall is double the size it used to be. One might get a boat in now."

Raising his light and holding it outward he tried to look into the depths below; not succeeding, he took a stone and flung it into the water, where it fell with a sonorous noise that sounded like a threat, while the wash of the ruffled water against the steps and the foundations gave an answering ripple.

"Well," said Courtin, "there is evidently nothing there that can hear us but the fish of the lake; and the old proverb says, you know, 'Mute as a fish.'"

Just then a stone came rolling down from the roof along the tower wall and fell into the courtyard.

"Did you hear that?" asked Monsieur Hyacinthe, uneasily.

"Yes," replied Courtin. Unlike his companion, who seemed to grow more timorous in the gigantic shadow thrown by the ruins, the farmer recovered courage after convincing himself that no human being could possibly be lurking in the courtyard. "I've seen large bits of masonry fall from the top of that old tower just from the blow of a bat's wing."

"Hé, hé!" exclaimed Monsieur Hyacinthe, with his nasal laugh, which was like that of a German Jew; "it is precisely the night-birds we have to fear."

"Yes, the Chouans," replied Courtin. "But no! these ruins are too near the village; and though a villain I thought I had got rid of has been seen roaming about here to-day, I feel sure he won't dare to risk a visit by night."

"Put out your light, then!"

"No, no; we don't need it to talk by, that's true, but we have something else to do than talk, I'm thinking."

"Have we?" said Monsieur Hyacinthe, eagerly.

"Yes. Come into this recess, where we shall be sheltered, and where the light can be hidden."

So saying he led Monsieur Hyacinthe beneath the archway that led down to the gate of the cellars, placed the light behind a fallen stone, and sat down himself on the cellar steps.

"Do you mean to say," said Monsieur Hyacinthe, planting himself in front of Courtin, "that you are going to give me the name of the street and the number of the house in which the duchess is hidden?"

"That, or something like it," replied Courtin, who had heard the clinking of gold on Monsieur Hyacinthe's person, his eyes sparkling with greed.

"Come, don't lose time in useless words. Do you know where she is living?"

"No."

"Then why have you brought me here? Ha! if I have a regret it is that I ever committed myself to a dawdler like you."

For all answer Courtin took the paper he had picked from the ashes of the hearth in the rue du Marché and held it out to Monsieur Hyacinthe, raising the light that he might see to read it.

"Who wrote that?" asked the Jew.

"The young girl I told you about, who was with the person we are in search of."

"Yes, but she is not with her now."

"That is true."

"Therefore I should be glad to know what good this letter is. What does it prove? How can it help our purpose?"

Courtin shrugged his shoulders and replaced the candle beside the stone.

"Really, for a city gentleman," he said, "you are not very sharp."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Don't you see that the duchess offers an asylum to the man to whom the letter is addressed, in case he is in any danger?"

"Yes, what next?"

"Next? Why, if we put him in danger he is certain to take it."

"And then?"

"Then we can search the house he goes to, and catch them all together."

Monsieur Hyacinthe reflected.

"Yes, the scheme is a good one," he said, turning the letter over and over in his hand and holding it near the candle to make sure it contained no other writing.

"I should think it was a good one!" exclaimed Courtin.

"Where does that man live?" asked Monsieur Hyacinthe, carelessly.

"Oh, as for telling you where he lives, that's another matter. I've told you the scheme, and you think it a good one,--you said so yourself; if I told you how to carry it out I should just be giving myself away for nothing."

"But suppose the man does not accept the retreat offered to him, and does not go to the house where she is hidden?" said Monsieur Hyacinthe.

"Oh, that's impossible if we follow a plan I'll explain to you. His own house has two issues. We go to one with a posse of soldiers; he escapes by the other, which we leave clear; he sees no danger that way, but we follow him from a distance. You see for yourself the thing can't fail. And now, unfasten your belt and pay me the money."

"Will you come with me?"

"Of course I will."

"From now till the game is played you will not leave me a single instant?"

"I don't wish to, inasmuch as you only pay me half now."

"But remember this," said Monsieur Hyacinthe, with a determination scarcely to be expected from his pacific demeanor, "I warn you that if you make even one suspicious gesture, if I have the slightest reason to think you are deceiving me, I will blow your brains out."

So saying Monsieur Hyacinths drew a pistol from his pocket and showed it to his companion. The face of the man who made the threat was cold and calm, but a dangerous flash in his eye convinced the other that he was a man to keep his word.

"As you please," said Courtin; "and all the easier for you because I have no weapon."

"That's a blunder," remarked Monsieur Hyacinthe.

"Come," said Courtin, "pay me what you promised, and swear to me that if the thing succeeds you will pay me as much more."

"You may rely upon my word, which is sacred; a man is honest, or he is not honest. But why do you want to carry this gold yourself, as you and I are not to part?" continued Monsieur Hyacinthe, who seemed to have as much reluctance to part with his belt as Courtin had eagerness to grasp it.

"What!" exclaimed the latter; "don't you see I'm in a fever to touch that gold, to feel it, to handle it? I am dying to know if it is really there, even if I don't touch it. Why, for the joy of that, for that one moment of happiness when I feel it in my fingers, I've risked all! You shall give it to me now, or I'll not say another word. Yes! for this one moment I've braved everything, I've summoned courage,--I who am afraid of my shadow, I who trembled and shook when I walked up our avenue at night. Give me that gold, give me that gold, monsieur! We have many dangers to face, many risks to run yet; that gold will give me courage. Give me that gold if you wish me to be as calm, as relentless as yourself."

"Yes," replied Monsieur Hyacinthe, who had watched the vivid lighting up of the

peasant's dull, wan face as he said these words. "Yes, you shall have the money the instant you give me the address; but I will have the address, the address!"

One was as eager as the other for the thing each desired. Monsieur Hyacinthe rose, and took off his belt; Courtin, intoxicated with the metallic sound he heard, again stretched forth his hand to seize it.

"One moment!" cried Monsieur Hyacinthe; "give and take!"

"Yes, but let me first see if it is really gold you have there."

The Jew shrugged his shoulders, but he yielded to the wishes of his accomplice; he pulled the iron chain that closed the mouth of the leathern bag, and Courtin, dazzled by the gleam of gold, felt a shudder pass through all his body, while with elongated neck, and fixed eyes, and trembling lips, he plunged his hands with ineffable, indescribable pleasure into the heap of coin which rippled through his fingers.

"He lives," he said, "rue du Marché, No. 22; the other door is in an alley running parallel with the rue du Marché."

Maître Hyacinthe released his hold on the belt, which Courtin seized with a deep sigh of satisfaction. But almost at the same instant he raised his head with a terrified look.

"What is it?" asked Monsieur Hyacinthe.

"I heard steps," said the farmer, his face convulsed.

"No, no," said the Jew, "I heard nothing. I've been a fool to give you that money."

"Why?" said Courtin, clasping the belt to his breast as if afraid the other might snatch it back.

"Because it seems to double your fears."

With a rapid movement Courtin clutched his companion's arm.

"What is the matter?" asked Monsieur Hyacinthe again, beginning to feel uneasy.

"I tell you I hear steps overhead!" said Courtin, looking up to the dark and gloomy

space above them.

"Nonsense; perhaps you are ill."

"I don't feel well, that's true."

"Then let's leave the place; we have nothing more to do here, and it is time we were on the way to Nantes."

"No, no, not yet."

"Why not yet?"

"Let us hide here and listen. People are about, and they are watching for us; and if they are watching for us they'll guard the door. Oh, my God! my God! can it be that they are after my gold already?" moaned the farmer, trying to fasten the belt about his waist, but trembling so violently that he could not do it.

"My good friend, you are certainly losing your head," said Monsieur Hyacinthe, who proved to be the more courageous man of the two. "Let us put out the light and hide in the cellar. We can see from there if you are mistaken."

"You are right, you are right," said Courtin, blowing out the candle as he opened the cellar door and went down the first step into the inundated vault.

But he went no farther. A cry of terror burst from him, in which could be heard the words:--

"Help, help! Monsieur Hyacinthe!"

The latter laid a hand on his pistol, when a powerful hand seized his arm and twisted it as if to break it. The pain was so great that the Jew fell on his knees, the sweat pouring from his face as he cried out for mercy.

"One word, and I'll kill you like the dog you are!" said the voice of Maître Jacques. Then, addressing Joseph Picaut, who was just behind him, he went on: "Well, do-nothing, haven't you got him? What are you about?"

"Oh, the villain!" exclaimed Joseph, in a voice that was broken and breathless from

his efforts to hold Courtin, whom he had seized the moment the latter opened the door to go down the cellar stairs, and who was now making desperate efforts to save, not himself, but his gold. "Oh, the traitor! he is biting me, tearing me. If you hadn't forbidden me to bleed him, I'd soon have done for him."

At the same instant two bodies fell within six feet of Monsieur Hyacinthe, whom Maître Jacques was pinning to the ground.

"If he kicks too long, kill him, kill him!" said Maître Jacques. "Now that I know all I want to know, I don't see why not."

"Damn it! why didn't you say so before, and I'd have finished him at once!"

By a violent effort Picaut threw Courtin under him and got a knee upon his breast, pulling a long-bladed knife from his belt, on which, dark as it was, Courtin saw the light flashing.

"Mercy! mercy!" cried the mayor. "I'll tell all, I'll confess all; but don't kill me!"

Maître Jacques' hand stayed Picaut's arm, which, in spite of Courtin's offer, was in the act of descending upon him.

"Don't kill him!" said Maître Jacques, "on reflection, he may still be useful. Tie him up like a sausage, and don't let him stir, paws or toes!"

The luckless Courtin was so terrified that he actually held out his hands to Joseph, who bound them with a slender, loose rope Maître Jacques had made his companion bring with him. Nevertheless, the wretched man would not release his clutch on the belt full of gold, which he held pressed to his stomach by his elbow.

"Haven't you bound him yet?" cried Maître Jacques, impatiently.

"Let me finish roping this paw," replied Joseph.

"Very good; and when you've done bind this fellow, too," continued Maître Jacques, pointing to Monsieur Hyacinthe, whom he had allowed to get upon his knees, in which posture the Jew remained silent and motionless.

"I could do it faster if there were any light," said Joseph Picaut, provoked to find a knot in his rope, which in the darkness he could not undo.

"Well, after all," said Maître Jacques, "why the devil are we in a hurry? Why not light the lantern? It would do my soul good to see the faces of these sellers of kings and princes."

Suiting the action to the word, Maître Jacques pulled out a little lantern and lighted it with a sulphur match as imperturbably as if he had been in the depths of his forest of Touvois; then he turned the light full on the faces of Monsieur Hyacinthe and Courtin. By the gleam of that light Joseph Picaut saw the leather belt the farmer was hugging to his breast, and he sprang forward to tear it from him. Maître Jacques mistook the object of his action. Thinking that the Chouan's hatred to Courtin had got the better of him, and that he meant to kill him, the master of rabbits sprang forward to prevent it.

As he did so a line of fire darted from the upper part of the tower and shot through the darkness; a dull explosion was heard and Maître Jacques fell head foremost on Courtin's body, who felt his face covered with a warm and fetid liquid.

"Ha! villain!" cried Maître Jacques, rising on one knee and addressing Joseph, "ha! you have led me into a trap. I forgave you your lie, but you shall pay for your treachery!"

Raising his pistol, he fired at close quarters on Pascal Picaut's brother. The lantern rolled down the steps into the waters below and was extinguished; the smoke of the two shots made the darkness deeper.

Monsieur Hyacinthe, when Maître Jacques fell, rose pale, mute, mad with terror, and ran hither and thither about the tower, endeavoring to find an exit. At last he saw through a narrow window the sparkle of a star on the black vault of heaven, and with the strength of terror he climbed to the opening, giving no heed to the fate of his accomplice, and plunged head foremost into the lake.

The immersion into cold water calmed the blood which was rushing violently to his brain, and he recovered his self-control. He came to the surface of the water, where he kept himself by swimming. Then he looked about him to see in which direction he had better turn, and his eyes lighted on a boat moored at the breach in the wall through which the waters of the lake had forced their way into the tower. Shuddering, he swam for it, making as little noise as he could, climbed in, seized the oars, and was five hundred feet away from the shore before he even thought of his companion.

"Rue du Marché, No. 22," he cried. "No, terror hasn't made me forget it. Success depends now on the rapidity with which I get to Nantes. Poor Courtin!--I may now consider myself heir to the last fifty thousand francs; but what a fool I was to give him the first! I might at this very moment have had the address and the money both. What a blunder! what a blunder!"

Then, to stifle his remorse, the Jew bent to his oars and made the boat spin across the lake with a vigor which seemed quite incompatible with his weakly appearance.

XXXVII.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE, AND A TOOTH FOR A TOOTH.

In order to follow Monsieur Hyacinthe for a moment we were obliged to leave our older acquaintance, Courtin, stretched on the ground, legs and arms tied, in thickest darkness, between the two wounded bandits.

The sound of Maître Jacques' heavy breathing and Joseph's moans terrified him as much as their threats had done. He trembled lest one or the other might revive and remember he was here, and execute summary vengeance on him; he held his breath, lest even its tremor might recall him to their minds.

And yet, another feeling was even more powerful in him than the love of life. He was resolved to keep to the very last moment the precious belt from those who

might be his murderers, and he continued to hug it to his breast, even daring, in order to hide it, that which he would not have dared to save his life; he gently suffered the belt to slip to the ground beside him, and then with an almost imperceptible motion he crept in the same direction until he had covered it with his body.

Just as he had managed to execute this difficult man[oe]uvre he heard the door of the tower rolling and creaking on its rusty hinges, and he saw a sort of phantom clothed in black advancing toward him, holding a torch in one hand, and dragging with the other a heavy musket, the butt-end of which resounded on the stones.

Though the shades of death were already darkening his eyes, Joseph Picaut saw the apparition; for he cried out, in a voice broken with agony:--

"The widow! the widow!"

The widow of Pascal Picaut, for it was she, walked slowly forward, without a glance at Courtin or Maître Jacques, who, pressing his left hand on a wound in his breast, was striving to rise upon his right; then she stopped in front of her brother-in-law and gazed at him with an eye that was still threatening.

"A priest! a priest!" cried the dying man, horrified by that awful phantom, which roused a hitherto unknown feeling in his breast,--that of remorse.

"A priest! What good will a priest do you, miserable man? Can he bring back to life your brother whom you murdered?"

"No, no!" cried Joseph; "no, I did not murder Pascal. I swear it by eternity, to which I am now going!"

"You did not kill him, but you let others do so,--if, indeed, you did not urge them to the crime. Not content with that, you fired at me. You would have been twice a fratricide in one day if the hand of a brave man had not pushed aside your weapon. But be sure of this: it is not the harm you tried to do to me that I am avenging. It is the hand of God that strikes you through me--Cain!"

"What!" exclaimed Joseph Picaut and Maître Jacques, "that shot--"

"I fired it; I knew I should surprise you here in the commission of another crime, and it was I who shot you in the act. Yes, Joseph, yes; you so brave, you so proud of your strength, bow down before God's judgment!--you die by a woman's hand."

"What matters it to me how I die? Death comes from God. I implore you, woman, give my repentance chance for efficacy; let me be reconciled to the Heaven I have offended; bring me a priest, I implore you!"

"Did your brother have a priest in his last hour? Did you give him, you, the time to lift his soul to God when he fell beneath the blows of your accomplices at the ford of the Boulogne? No, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth! Die a violent death; die without help temporal or spiritual, as your brother died. And may all brigands," she added, turning to Maître Jacques, "all brigands who, in the name of any flag, no matter which it is, bring ruin to their country and mourning to their homes, descend with you to the lowest hell!"

"Woman!" cried Maître Jacques, who had succeeded in raising himself, "whatever be his crime, whatever he may have done to you, it is not good that you should speak to him thus. Forgive him, that you may yourself be forgiven!"

"I?" said the widow. "Who dares to raise a voice against me?"

"The man whom, without intending it, you have sent to his grave; he who received the ball you meant for your brother-in-law; the man who speaks to you, I--I whom you have killed. And yet I am not angry with you; for, by the way the world wags now, the best thing men of heart can do is to go and see if that three-colored rag which seems to be to the fore here waves in God's heaven."

Marianne gave a cry of astonishment, almost of horror, when she heard what Maître Jacques told her. As the reader has doubtless understood, she had watched for the arrival of Courtin; then when he and his companion had entered the tower she went up the old staircase and along the outer gallery till she reached the platform of the

tower; thence, through the rafters of the roof, she had fired on her brother-in-law.

We have seen how, in consequence of the movement, made by Maître Jacques to save Courtin, he was the one to receive the shot.

This miscarriage of her hatred had, as we have said, bewildered the widow; but quickly recovering herself as she remembered what bandits these men really were, she said:--

"Even if that is true, if I did shoot one intending to shoot the other, my shot struck you as you were both about to commit another crime. I have saved the life of an innocent man."

A savage smile curled the pale lips of Maître Jacques on hearing her last words. He turned toward Courtin and felt in his belt for the handle of his second pistol.

"Ha! yes!" he said with a dangerous laugh; "here's an innocent man; I had almost forgotten him. Well, that innocent, since you remind me of him, I'll give him his brevet as martyr. I won't die without accomplishing my mission."

"You shall not stain your last hour with blood, as you have stained your whole life, Maître Jacques!" cried the widow, placing herself between Courtin and the Chouan. "I know how to prevent it."

And she turned the muzzle of her gun full on Maître Jacques.

"Very good," said Maître Jacques, as if he resigned himself. "Presently, if God allows me time and strength, I will make you know the two scoundrels whom you call innocent; but, for the time being, I will let this one live. In exchange, and to deserve the absolution I gave you just now, forgive your poor brother. Don't you hear the rattle in his throat? He will be dead in ten minutes, and then it will be too late."

"No, never! never!" said the widow, in a muffled voice.

Not only the voice but the rattle in Joseph's throat grew perceptibly weaker, and yet

he did not cease to use his last remaining strength in beseeching his sister's pardon.

"It is God and not I whom you must implore," she said.

"No," said the dying man, shaking his head; "I dare not pray to God so long as your curse is upon me."

"Then address your brother, and pray to him to forgive you."

"My brother!" murmured Joseph, closing his eyes as if a terrible spectre were before him; "my brother! I shall see him! I shall be face to face with him!"

And he strove to push away with his hand the bloody phantom which seemed to beckon to him. Then, in a voice that was hardly intelligible, and was indeed scarcely more than a whisper,--

"Brother! brother!" he murmured, "why do you turn away your head when I pray to you? In the name of our mother, Pascal, let me clasp your knees. Remember the tears we shed together in our childhood, which the first Blues made so bitter. Forgive me for having followed the terrible path our father enjoined on both of us. Alas! alas! how could I know it would bring you and me face to face as enemies? My God! my God! he does not answer me! Oh, Pascal, why do you turn away your head? Oh! my poor child, my little Louis, whom I shall never see again," continued the Chouan, "pray to your uncle, pray to him for me! He loved you as his own child; ask him, in the name of your dying father, to help a repentant sinner to reach the throne of God! Ah, brother! brother!" he murmured, with a sudden expression of joy that bordered on ecstasy, "you hear him, you pardon me, you stretch your hand to the child. My God! my God! take my soul now, for my brother has forgiven me!"

He fell back upon the ground from which, by a mighty effort, he had risen to stretch his arms toward the vision.

During this time, and gradually, the hatred and vengeance in the widow's face subsided. When Joseph spoke of the little boy whom Pascal loved as his own child, a tear forced its way from her eyelids; and when at last, by the gleam of her torch,

she saw the face of the dying man illuminated, not with an earthly light, but by a sacred halo, she fell upon her knees, and pressing the hand of her wounded brother, she cried out:--

"I believe you, I believe you, Joseph! God unseals the eyes of the dying and lets them see into the heights of heaven. If Pascal pardons you, I pardon you. As he forgets, so I forget. Yes, I forget all to remember one thing only,--that you were his brother. Brother of Pascal, die in peace!"

"Thank you, thank you," stammered Joseph, whose voice now hissed through his lips, which were stained with a bloody froth. "Thank you! but--the wife, the children?"

"Your wife shall be my sister, and your children are my children," said the widow, solemnly. "Die in peace, Joseph!"

The hand of the Chouan went to his forehead as though he meant to make the sign of the cross; his lips murmured a few words, doubtless not said for human ears, for no one understood them. Then he opened his eyes unnaturally wide, stretched out his arm, and gave a sigh; it was his last.

"Amen!" said Maître Jacques.

The widow knelt down and prayed beside the body for some instants,--quite amazed that her eyes should be filled with tears for him who had made her weep so bitterly.

A long silence followed. No doubt this silence oppressed Maître Jacques, for he suddenly called out:--

"Sacredié! who would suppose there was one living Christian still here? I say one, for I don't call Judas a Christian."

The widow quivered; beside the dead she had indeed forgotten the dying.

"I'll go back to the house and send help," she said.

"Help? Don't do anything of the kind; they'd only cure me for the guillotine; and,

thank you, la Picaut, I'd rather die the death of a soldier. I've got it, and I won't let go of it now."

"Do you suppose I'd give you up to the authorities?"

"Yes; for you are a Blue and the wife of a Blue. Damn it! the capture of Maître Jacques would make a fine figure on your record-book."

"My husband was a patriot, and I shared his feelings, that is true. But I have a horror, above all things, of traitors and treachery. For all the gold in the world I would not betray a person, not even you."

"You say you have a horror of treachery. Do you hear that, you cur?"

"Come, Jacques, let me send help," said the widow.

"No," said the Chouan bandit, "I'm at the end of my tether; I feel it and I know it. I've made too many such holes not to know all about it. In two hours, or three at most, I shall be disporting myself on the great open moor,--the last, grand, beautiful moor of the good God. But listen to me now."

"I am listening."

"This man whom you see here," he continued, pushing Courtin with his foot as he might a noxious animal, "this man, for a few gold coins, has sold a head which ought to be sacred to all, not only because it is of those who are destined to wear a crown, but because her heart is noble and kind and generous."

"That head," replied the widow, "I have sheltered beneath my roof."

In the portrait Maître Jacques had drawn she recognized the duchess.

"Yes, you saved her that time, la Picaut, I know it; and it is that which makes you so great in my eyes; it is that which leads me to make you my last request."

"Tell me what it is."

"Come nearer and stoop down; you alone must know what I have to say."

The widow went close to Maître Jacques and leaned over him and listened

attentively.

"You must," he said in a very low voice, "tell all this to the man you have in your house."

"Who is that?" asked the widow, thunderstruck.

"The man you are hiding in your stable; the one you go every night to nurse and comfort."

"But who told you?"

"Pooh! do you think anything can be hidden from Maître Jacques? All I say is true, la Picaut, and it makes Maître Jacques the Chouan, Maître Jacques the Chauffeur, proud to be among your friends."

"But the gars is a very sick man; he has hardly strength to stand, and then only by leaning on the wall."

"He'll find strength, never fear; he's a man,--a man indeed such as there'll be no more of after we have gone," said the Vendéan, with savage pride; "and if he can't take the field himself he'll make others do so. Tell him merely that he must warn Nantes instantly, without losing a minute, a second; he must warn he knows who. That other man who was here is already on the march while we are talking."

"It shall be done, Maître Jacques."

"Ah! if that rascal Joseph had only spoken sooner!" resumed Maître Jacques, raising his body to stop the blood which was rushing violently to his chest. "He knew, I am certain, what was plotting between these two villains; but he had them in his power and he never thought to die. Well! man proposes, and God disposes. It must have been the booty that tempted him. By the bye, widow, you ought to be able to find that booty somewhere."

"What must I do with it?"

"Divide it in two parts; give one to the orphans this war has made, white as well as

blue; that's my share. The other belongs to Joseph; give that to his children."

Courtin gave a sigh of anguish; for the words were spoken loud enough for him to hear.

"No," said the widow, "no, it is the money of Judas; it would bring evil. I will not take that money for those poor children, innocent as they are."

"You are right; then give it all to the poor. The hands that receive alms cleanse everything, even crime."

"And he?" said the widow, motioning toward Courtin but not looking at him, "what is to be done with him?"

"He's well bound and gagged, isn't he?"

"He seems to be."

"Well, leave it to the man you have at your house to say what shall be done with him."

"So be it."

"By the bye, la Picaut, when you go for him, give him this roll of tobacco. I have no further use for it, and I think it will please him mightily. I declare, though," continued the master of warrens, "it makes me half sorry to die. Ha! I'd give my twenty-five thousand francs prize-money to see the meeting of our man and this one; droll enough, that will be!"

"But you must not stay here," said Marianne Picaut. "We have a little bedroom in the citadel, where I will carry you. There, at any rate, you can see a priest."

"As you please, widow; but first, do me the kindness to make sure that my scoundrel is securely bound. It would embitter my last moments, don't you see, if I thought he would get loose before the shaking up he is going to have presently."

The widow bent over Courtin. The ropes were so tightly bound around his arms that they entered the flesh which was red and swollen on each side of them. The farmer's

face, above all, betrayed the misery he was enduring and was paler than that of Maître Jacques.

"He can't stir," said Marianne. "See! Besides, I'll turn the key on him."

"Very good; it won't be for long. You will go at once, won't you, la Picaut?"

"Yes, I promise."

"Thank you. Ah! the thanks I give you are nothing to those the man you have over there will give when you tell him all."

"Well, well! Now let me carry you to the citadel, where you can have the care you need. The confessor and the doctor will both hold their tongues, don't be afraid of that."

"Very good; carry me along. It will be queer to see Maître Jacques die in a bed, when he never, in all his life, slept on anything but ferns and heather."

The widow took him in her arms and carried him to the little room we have mentioned, and laid him on a pallet that was kept there. Maître Jacques, in spite of the suffering he must have endured, in spite of the gravity of his position, continued, in the presence of death, the same merry but sardonic being he had been all his life. The nature of this man, totally unlike that of his compatriots, never belied itself for a single instant. But, in the midst of his lively sarcasms, flung at the things he had defended quite as much as at those he had attacked, he never ceased to urge the widow Picaut to go at once and fulfil the errand to Jean Oullier which he had intrusted to her.

Thus urged, Marianne only took time to lock the door and push the bolts of the fruit-room in which she left Courtin a prisoner. She crossed the garden, re-entered the inn, and found her old mother greatly alarmed by the noise of the shots which had reached her. Her daughter's absence increased the old woman's fears, and she was beginning to be terribly alarmed lest the widow had been made the victim of some trap by her brother-in-law, when Marianne returned.

The widow, without telling her mother a word of what had happened, begged her not to let any one pass into the ruins; then, flinging her mantle over her shoulders, she prepared to go out. Just as she laid her hand on the latch of the door a light knock was given without. Marianne turned back to her mother.

"Mother," she said, "if any stranger asks to pass the night at the inn say we have no room. No one must enter the house this night; the hand of God is upon it."

The person outside rapped again.

"Who's there?" said the widow, opening the door, but barring the way with her own person.

Bertha appeared on the threshold.

"You sent me word this morning, madame," said the young girl, "that you had an important communication to make to me."

"You are right," said the widow. "I had wholly forgotten it."

"Good God!" cried Bertha, noticing that Marianne's kerchief was stained with blood, "has any harm happened to my people,--to Mary, my father, Michel?"

And in spite of her strength of mind, this last thought shook her so terribly that she leaned against the wall to keep herself from falling.

"Don't be uneasy," answered the widow. "I have no misfortune to tell you; on the contrary, I am to say that an old friend whom you thought lost is living, and wants to see you."

"Jean Oullier!" cried Bertha, instantly guessing whom she meant, "Jean Oullier! It is he whom you mean, isn't it? He is living? Oh, God be thanked! my father will be so glad! Take me to him at once,--at once, I entreat you!"

"It was my intention to do so this morning; but since then events have happened which lay upon you a duty more pressing still."

"A duty!" exclaimed Bertha, astonished. "What duty?"

"That of going to Nantes immediately; for I doubt if poor Jean Oullier, exhausted as he is, can possibly do what Maître Jacques requests of him."

"What am I to do in Nantes?"

"Tell him, or her, whom you call Petit-Pierre that the secret of her present hiding-place has been sold and bought, and she must leave it instantly. Any place is safer than the one she is now in. Betrayal is close upon her; God grant you may get there in time!"

"Betrayed!" cried Bertha, "betrayed by whom?"

"By the man who once before sent the soldiers to my house to capture her,--by Courtin, the mayor of La Logerie."

"Courtin! Have you seen him?"

"Yes," replied Marianne, laconically.

"Oh!" cried Bertha, clasping her hands, "let me see him!"

"Young girl, young girl," said the widow, evading a reply to this request, "it is I, whom the partisans of that woman have made a widow, who urge you to make haste and save her; and it is you, who boast of being faithful to her, who hesitate to go!"

"No, no; that is not so!" cried Bertha. "I do not hesitate; I am going."

She made a motion to go out; the widow stopped her.

"You cannot go to Nantes on foot; you would get there too late. In the stable of this house you will find two horses; take either you please, and tell the hostler to saddle him."

"Oh," said Bertha, "I can saddle him myself. But what can we ever do for you, my poor widow, who have twice saved her life?"

"Tell her to remember what I said to her in my cottage beside the bodies of two men killed for her sake; tell her that it is a crime to bring discord and civil war into a region where her enemies themselves protect her from treachery. Go, mademoiselle,

go! and may God guide you."

So saying, the widow left the house hurriedly,--going first to the rector of Saint-Philbert, whom she asked to visit the citadel, and then, as rapidly as possible, she struck across the fields to her own house.

XXXVIII.

THE RED-BREECHES.

For the last twenty-four hours Bertha's anxiety had been extreme. It was not only on Courtin that her suspicions fell; they extended to Michel himself.

Her recollections of that evening preceding the fight at Chêne, the apparition of a man at her sister's window, had never entirely left Bertha's mind; from time to time they crossed it like a flash of flame, leaving behind them a painful furrow, which the passive attitude taken toward her by Michel during his convalescence was far from soothing. But when she learned that Courtin, whom she supposed to have acted under Michel's directions, had ordered the schooner to sail, and when, above all, she returned, frightened and breathless with love, to the farmhouse at La Logerie, and did not find him whom she came to seek, then indeed her jealous suspicions became intense.

Nevertheless, she forgot all to obey the duty laid upon her by the widow; before that duty all considerations must give way, even those of her love. She ran to the stable without losing another moment; chose the horse that seemed to her most fit to do the distance rapidly; gave him a double feed of oats to put into his legs the elasticity they needed; threw upon his back, as he ate, the sort of pack-saddle used in those regions; and, bridle in hand, waited until the animal had finished eating.

As she stood there waiting, a sound, well-known in those days, reached her ears. It was that of the regular tramp of a troop of armed men. At the same moment a loud knocking was heard on the inn door.

Through a glazed sash, which looked into a bake-house that opened into the kitchen, the young girl saw the soldiers, and discovered at the first words they said that they wanted a guide. At that moment everything was significant to Bertha; she trembled for her father, for Michel, for Petit-Pierre. She therefore would not start until she had found out what these men were after. Confident of not being recognized in the peasant-woman's dress she wore, she passed through the bake-house and entered the kitchen. A lieutenant was in command of the little squad.

"Do you mean," he was saying to Mère Chompré, "that there's not a man in the house,--not one?"

"No, monsieur; my daughter is a widow; and the only hostler we have is out somewhere, but I don't know where."

"Well, your daughter is the person I want. If she were here she would serve us as guide, as she did at the Springs of Baugé one famous night; or, if she couldn't come herself, she might tell us of some one to take her place. I know I could trust her; but these miserable peasants, half Chouans, whom we compel to guide us against their will, never leave us an easy moment."

"Mistress Picaut is absent; but perhaps we can supply some one in her place," said Bertha, advancing resolutely. "Are you going far, gentlemen?"

"Bless my soul! a pretty girl!" said the young officer, approaching her. "Guide me where you will, my beauty, and the devil take me if I don't follow you!"

Bertha lowered her eyes and twisted the corner of her apron like a bashful village-girl, as she answered:--

"If it isn't very far from here, and the mistress is willing, I'll go with you myself. I know the neighborhood."

"Agreed!" cried the lieutenant.

"But on one condition," continued Bertha,--"that some one shall bring me back here.

I am afraid to be out in the roads alone."

"God forbid I should yield that privilege to any one, my dear, even if it costs me my epaulets!" said the officer. "Do you know the way to Banl[oe]uvre?"

At the name of the farmhouse belonging to Michel, where she had lived herself for some days with the marquis and Petit-Pierre, Bertha felt a shudder run through her body, a cold sweat came upon her forehead, her heart beat violently, but she managed to master her emotion.

"Banl[oe]uvre?" she repeated. "No, that's not in our parts. Is it a village or a château, Banl[oe]uvre?"

"It is a farmhouse."

"A farmhouse! Whom does it belong to?"

"To a gentleman of your neighborhood."

"Are you billeted at Banl[oe]uvre?"

"No; we have an expedition there."

"What is an expedition?"

"Well done!" cried the lieutenant. "Here's a pretty girl who wants information!"

"Natural enough, too. If I take you, or get some one to take you to Banl[oe]uvre, of course I want to know why you are going there."

"We are going," said the sub-lieutenant, joining in the conversation for the sake of showing his wit, "to give a white such a dose of lead that he'll turn blue."

"Ah!" cried Bertha, unable to repress the exclamation.

"Hey! what's the matter with you?" asked the lieutenant. "If we had told you the name of the man we are going to arrest, I should have said you were in love with him."

"I?" said Bertha, calling up her strength of mind to hide the terror in her heart. "I, in

love with a gentleman?"

"Kings have married shepherdesses," said the sub-lieutenant, who seemed to be of a comic humor.

"Well, well!" cried the lieutenant; "here's the shepherdess fainting away like a fine lady."

"I? fainting!" exclaimed Bertha, endeavoring to laugh. "Nonsense, we don't have city manners here!"

"Nevertheless, you are as pale as your linen, my pretty girl."

"Goodness! you talk of shooting a man as you would a rabbit in a hedge!"

"Not at all the same thing," said the sub-lieutenant; "for a rabbit is good to eat, whereas a dead Chouan is good for nothing."

Bertha could not prevent her proud, energetic face from betraying, by its expression, the disgust she felt at the jokes of the young officer.

"Ah, ça!" said the lieutenant, "you are not as patriotic as your mistress. I see we sha'n't get much help from you."

"I am patriotic; but much as I hate my enemies, I can't see them killed with a dry eye."

"Pooh!" said the officer, "you'll get accustomed to it, just as we soldiers get accustomed to sleeping on the high-roads instead of our beds. To-night, when the letter of that cursed peasant came to the guard-house at Saint-Martin, and obliged me to start off at once, I damned the State to all the devils. Well, I now see I was wrong, for it has its compensations,--in fact, instead of cursing and swearing, I find the expedition charming."

So saying, and as if to add to the pleasures of the situation, he stooped and tried to snatch a kiss from the neck of the young girl. Bertha, who did not suspect his amorous intention, felt the young man's breath upon her face and started away, red

as a pomegranate, her nostrils quivering, her eyes sparkling with indignation.

"Oh, oh!" continued the lieutenant, "you are not going to get angry for a silly kiss, are you, my beauty?"

"Do you think, because I am a poor country-girl, that I can be insulted with impunity?"

"'Insulted with impunity'! hey, what fine language!" said the sub-lieutenant; "and they told us we were coming to a land of savages."

"Do you know," said the lieutenant, looking fixedly at Bertha, "that I've a great mind to do something."

"Do what?"

"Arrest you on suspicion, and not let you off till you pay me the ransom I would set upon your liberty."

"What would that be?"

"A kiss."

"I can't let you kiss me, because you are neither my father, nor brother, nor husband."

"Are they the only ones who will have the right to put their lips to those pretty cheeks?"

"Of course they are."

"Why so?"

"I don't wish to forget my duty."

"Your duty! oh, you little joker!"

"Don't you think we peasant-girls have our duties as well as you soldiers have yours? Come" (Bertha tried to laugh), "if I were to ask you the name of the man you are going to arrest, and it would be against your duty to tell it, would you tell it to

me?"

"Faith," said the young man, "I shouldn't fail much in duty if I did tell you; for there isn't, I think, the slightest harm in your knowing it."

"But suppose there were any harm?"

"Oh, then--but I declare I don't know; your eyes have turned my head, and I really can't say what I should do. Well, yes, if you are really as curious as I am weak, I'll tell you that name and betray the country; only, I must be paid for it with a kiss."

Bertha's apprehensions were so great,--she was so convinced that Michel was the object of the expedition,--that she forgot, with her usual impetuosity, all caution, and without reflecting on the suspicions she gave rise to by her persistency, she abruptly offered him her cheek. He took two resounding kisses.

"Give and take," he said, laughing. "The name of the man we are going to arrest is Monsieur de Vincé."

Bertha drew back and looked at the officer. A misgiving crossed her mind that he had tricked her.

"Come, let's start," said the lieutenant to his subordinate. "I shall go and ask the mayor for the guide we evidently can't get here." Turning to Bertha he added, "Any guide he may give me won't please me as you do, my dear," and he gave an affected sigh. Then he called to his men: "Forward there, march!"

Before starting himself he asked for a match to light his cigar. Bertha searched in vain on the mantel-piece. The officer then took a paper from his pocket and lighted it at the lamp. Bertha watched his movements and threw a glance at the paper, which the flames were beginning to shrivel up, and she distinctly saw there Michel's name.

"I suspected it," thought she. "He lied to me. Yes, yes, it is Michel they are going to arrest."

As the officer threw down the half-burned paper, she put her foot upon it with some

difficulty, and the officer took advantage of her motions to seize another kiss.

"Hush!" he said, putting his finger on his lip; "you are not a peasant-girl. Look out for yourself, if you have any reason for hiding. If you play your part as badly with those who are seeking you as you have with me, who am not instructed to arrest you, you are lost."

So saying, he hastily turned away, fearing perhaps to be lost himself. He was no sooner out of sight than Bertha seized the remains of the paper. It contained the denunciation that Courtin had sent to Nantes by the peasant Matthieu, which the latter, to save himself trouble, had put into the first post-office he came to. This post-office was that of Saint-Martin, the next village to Saint-Philbert.

Enough remained unburned of Courtin's writing to enlighten Bertha as to the object of the troop now advancing on Banl[oe]uvre. Her head swam. If the sentence already pronounced on the young man were executed by the soldiers, Michel would be dead in two hours; she saw him, a bloody corpse, reddening the earth about him. Her mind gave way.

"Where is Jean Oullier?" she cried to the old landlady.

"Jean Oullier?" said the latter, gazing stolidly at the girl. "I don't know what you mean."

"I ask you, where is Jean Oullier?"

"Isn't Jean Oullier dead?" replied Mère Chompré.

"But your daughter, where has your daughter gone?"

"I'm sure I don't know; she never tells me where she is going when she goes out. She is old enough to be the mistress of her own actions."

Bertha thought of the Picaut cottage; but to go there would take her an hour, and it might prove a waste of time. That hour would suffice to insure Michel's death.

"She will be back in a minute," she said to the old woman. "When she comes tell her

I could not go as soon as she expected to the place she knows of; but I will be there before daylight."

Running to the stables, she slipped the bridle on the horse, sprang upon his back, rode him out of the building, and giving him a vigorous blow with a switch, put him at once into a gait that was neither trot nor gallop, but fast enough to gain half an hour at least on the soldiers. As she crossed the market-place of Saint-Philbert she heard on her right the receding footsteps of the little troop.

Then she took her bearings, passed the houses, dashed her horse into the river Boulogne, and came out to join the road a little above the forest of Machecoul.

XXXIX.

A WOUNDED SOUL.

Fortunately for Bertha the horse she was riding had better qualities than his appearance denoted. He was a little Breton beast which, when quiet, seemed gloomy, sad, depressed, like the men of his native region; but once warmed to action (like them again) he increased every moment in vigor and energy. With flaring nostrils, and his tangled mane floating in the wind, he attained to a gallop; presently his gallop became a run. Plains, valleys, and hedges passed and disappeared behind him with fantastic rapidity, while Bertha, bending low upon his neck, gave rein and urged him onward with voice and whip.

The belated peasants whom she met, seeing the horse and its rider fade into the distance as quickly as they had seen them appear, took them for phantoms, and signed themselves devoutly behind them.

Rapid as this going was, it was not as fast as Bertha's heart demanded; to her a second seemed a week, a minute a year. She felt the terrible responsibility that rested on her,--the responsibility of blood and death and shame. Could she save Michel, and, having saved him, should she still have time to avert the danger that threatened

Petit-Pierre? That was the question.

A thousand confused ideas coursed through her brain; she blamed herself for not having given Marianne's mother more careful instructions; she was seized with vertigo at the thought that after the headlong rush of that mad ride, the poor little Breton horse would surely be unable to return from Banl[oe]uvre to Nantes; she reproached herself for using in the interests of her love the time and resources which might be necessary to save the noblest head in France; then she reflected that unless others possessed, as she did, the passwords, it would be impossible for any one to reach the illustrious fugitive. So thinking, and torn by a thousand conflicting emotions, culminating in a sort of intoxication or madness, she pressed her horse with her heel and continued her wild ride, which, at any rate, cooled her brain, burning with thoughts that were like to burst it.

At the end of an hour she reached the forest of Touvois. There she was compelled to slacken speed; the way was full of quagmires. Twice the little horse plunged into them. She was forced to let him walk, calculating that in any case she had gained sufficiently on the soldiers to give Michel time to escape.

She hoped; she breathed. A moment of joyful satisfaction came to quench the all-consuming anguish of her fears; once more Michel would owe to her his life!

We must have loved, we must have known the ineffable joy of sacrifice, to comprehend what there was of happiness in this immolation of herself to the man she loved, and the proud joy with which Bertha thought for an instant that Michel's life, which she was now about to save, might cost her dear.

Her mind was full of these thoughts when she saw the white walls of the farmhouse shining in the moonlight, framed by the dark tufts of the nut-trees. The gate of the farmyard was open. Bertha dismounted, fastened her horse to a ring in the outer wall, and crossed the yard on foot.

The manure which covered the ground deadened the sound of her steps; no dog

barked to welcome her, or to signify her presence to the inmates. To her great surprise Bertha noticed a horse standing, saddled and bridled, by the door of the house. The horse might belong to Michel; but then again it might belong to a stranger. Bertha was determined to make sure before entering the house.

One of the shutters in the room where Petit-Pierre had asked her hand of her father in Michel's name stood open. Bertha went softly up to it and looked within.

Hardly had her eyes rested on the interior of the room when she gave a stifled cry and almost fainted. She had seen Michel at Mary's knees; one hand was round her sister's waist, and the latter's hand was toying with his hair; their lips were smiling to each other; their eyes shone with that expression of joy which can never be mistaken by hearts that have loved.

The prostration caused by this discovery lasted but a second. Bertha rushed to the door of the room, pushed it open violently, and appeared on the threshold like an embodiment of Vengeance, her hair dishevelled, her eyes flaming, her face livid, her breast heaving.

Mary gave a cry and fell on her knees with her face in her hands. She had guessed the whole at a single glance, so frightfully convulsed was Bertha's face.

Michel, horrified by Bertha's look, rose hastily, and, as though he found himself suddenly in presence of an enemy, he mechanically put his hand on his arms.

"Strike!" cried Bertha, who saw his action; "strike, miserable man! It will be a fit conclusion to your baseness and your treachery!"

"Bertha," stammered Michel, "let me tell you, let me explain to you!"

"To your knees! to your knees!--you and your accomplice!" cried Bertha. "Say on your knees the lies you will invent for your defence! Oh, the vile wretch! And I have flown here to save his life! I, half mad with terror and despair for the fate that was hanging over him; I, who have forgotten all, all, honor, duty; I, who laid my life at his feet, who had but one thought, one object, one desire, one wish,--that of saying

to him, 'Michel, look! see how I love you!'--I come, and I find him betraying his word, denying his promises, faithless to sacred ties--I will not say of love, but of gratitude--and with whom? for whom? The being I loved next to him in this world, the companion of my childhood,--my sister! Was there no other woman to seduce? Speak! speak, wretch!" went on Bertha, seizing the young man's arm and shaking it with violence. "Or did you wish, in deserting me, to take away my only consolation,--the heart of that second self I called a sister?"

"Bertha, listen to me!" said Michel. "Listen to me, I implore you! We are not, thank God, as guilty as you think us. Oh, if you did but know, Bertha!"

"I will hear nothing; I listen only to my heart, which grief is breaking, which despair has crushed; I listen only to the voice within me which says you are a coward! base! My God! my God!" she cried, grasping her hair in her clenched hands, "my God! is this the reward of my tenderness, which was so blind that my eyes refused to see, my ears to hear when they told me that this child, this timid, trembling, wavering, unmanly creature, was not worthy of my love? Oh, poor fool that I have been! I hoped that gratitude would bind him to her who took pity on his weakness, who braved all prejudice and public opinion to drag him from the bog of infamy and make his name, his degraded name, an honorable and honored one!"

"Ah!" cried Michel, rising, "enough! enough!"

"Yes, enough of a degraded name!" repeated Bertha. "That touches you, does it? So much the better; I will say it again and again. Yes, a name soiled and degraded by all that is most odious, cowardly, infamous,--by treachery! Oh, family of betrayers! The son continues in the way of the father; I ought to have expected it."

"Mademoiselle, mademoiselle!" said Michel, "you abuse the privilege of your sex in thus insulting me; and not only me, but all that a man holds most sacred,--the memory of his father!"

"Sex! sex! So I have a sex now, have I? I had none when you were betraying me at

the feet of that poor fool, none when you were making me the most miserable of creatures; but now, because I do not lament and tear my hair and beat my breast and drag myself to your feet, now, now you suddenly discover I am a woman, a being to be respected because she is gentle, to whom suffering must be spared because she is weak! No, no! for you I have no longer a sex. You have before you, from this hour, a being whom you have mortally offended, and who returns you insult for insult. Baron de la Logerie, coward and traitor double-dyed is he who seduces the sister of his betrothed wife,--yes, I was the affianced wife of that man! Baron de la Logerie, not only are you a traitor and a coward, but you are the son of a traitor and a coward; your father was the infamous wretch who sold and betrayed Charette. He, at least, paid the penalty of his crime, which he expiated with his life. You have been told that he was killed in hunting,--a benevolent lie, which I here refute. He was killed by one who saw him do his deed of treachery; he was killed by--"

"Sister!" cried Mary, springing forward and laying her hand on her sister's lips, "you are about to commit the crime you denounce in others; you are betraying secrets which do not belong to you!"

"Be it so; but that man shall speak! The contempt I cast upon him shall make him raise his head! He shall find, in his shame or in his pride, the strength to send me out of a life that is odious to me, a life which can be henceforth but a long delirium, an eternal despair. Let him complete with one blow the ruin he has begun! My God! my God!" continued Bertha, in whose eyes the tears were beginning to force their way, "why dost thou suffer men to break the hearts of thy living creatures? My God! my God! what can ever console me for this?"

"I will," said Mary. "I will, my sister, my good sister, my precious sister, if you will but hear me, if you will only pardon me."

"Pardon you! you?" cried Bertha, pushing Mary away from her. "No! you are the partner of that man; I know you no more! But, I warn you, watch each other

mutually, for your treachery will bring evil on both of you."

"Bertha! Bertha! in God's name, do not say such things! Do not curse us, do not insult us thus!"

"Ha!" exclaimed Bertha, "you feel it, do you? Yes, it is not without good reason that we are called 'she-wolves'! And now they'll say: 'The Demoiselles de Souday both loved Monsieur de la Logerie, and after promising to marry' (for I suppose he promised it to you as he did to me) 'he deserted them and took a third!' Why, even for wolves it would be monstrous!"

"Bertha! Bertha!"

"If I scorned the epithet they gave us, as I scorn all empty considerations of mock propriety," continued the young girl, still at the height of her excitement, "if I laughed at the conventions of society and the world, it was because we both--both, do you hear that?--because we both had the right to walk proudly in a virtuous independence of unsullied honor; because we were so high in our inward consciousness that such miserable insults were beneath our notice. But to-day all that is changed, and I here declare that I will do for you, Mary, what I disdain to do for myself,--if that man will not marry you, I will kill him. It will at least save our father's name from dishonor."

"That name is not dishonored; I swear it, Bertha!" cried Mary, kneeling down before her sister, who, shaken at last beyond her strength, fell into a chair and clasped her head in her hands.

"So much the better; it is one pain the less for her whom you will never see again." Then, twisting her arms with a gesture of despair, "My God! my God!" she cried, "after having loved them so well, to be forced to hate them!"

"No, you shall not hate me, Bertha! Your tears, your sufferings are worse to me than your anger. Forgive me! Oh, my God! what am I saying? You will think me guilty if I clasp your knees and ask your pardon. I am not guilty, I swear it. I will tell

you--but oh! you must not suffer, you must not weep! Monsieur de la Logerie," continued Mary, turning to Michel a face that was bathed in tears, "Monsieur de la Logerie, all that has happened is a dream; the daylight has come. Go! go far away; forget me! Go at once!"

"Mary," said Bertha, who had suffered her sister to take her hand, which the latter covered with tears and kisses, "you do not reflect; it is too late; it is impossible."

"Yes, yes, it is possible, Bertha!" said Mary, with a heart-rending smile. "Bertha, we will each take a spouse whose name will protect us from the calumnies of the world."

"Whom do you mean, poor child?"

Mary raised her hand to heaven.

"God!" she said.

Bertha did not answer; grief was choking her; but she held Mary tightly clasped against her breast, while Michel, utterly overcome, fell on a bench in a corner of the room.

"Forgive us!" murmured Mary, in her sister's ear. "Do not crush him! Is it his fault if a mistaken education has made him so irresolute and timid that he had no courage to speak when it was his duty to do so? He has long wished to tell you the truth, but I have withheld him. I alone am to blame, I hoped we should forget each other. Alas, alas! God has made us very feeble against our own hearts! But now, we will never leave each other, you and I, dear sister. Look at me! let me kiss your eyes! No one shall ever come between us! no man shall bring trouble and discord between two sisters. No, no! we will live alone together, loving each other,--alone with ourselves and God, to whom we will consecrate our lives; and there will still be happiness, my Bertha, happiness in our solitude, for we can pray for him, we can pray for him!"

Mary uttered the last words in a heart-rending tone. Michel, convulsed with anguish, came and knelt beside her before Bertha, who, with her mind bent on her sister, did

not notice him.

At this moment the soldiers appeared at the door which Bertha had left open, and the officer we have seen at the inn of Saint-Philbert advanced into the middle of the room and laid his hand on Michel's shoulder.

"You are Monsieur Michel de la Logerie?" he said.

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then I arrest you, in the name of the law."

"Great God!" cried Bertha, recovering her senses. "I had forgotten it! Ah, it is I who have killed him! And the other! down there! down there! Oh, what is happening there?"

"Michel, Michel!" said Mary, forgetting what she had just said to her sister. "Michel, if you die, I will die with you."

"No, no," cried Bertha, "he shall not die; I swear to you, sister, you shall still be happy! Make way, monsieur, make way!" she said to the officer.

"Mademoiselle," replied the latter, with painful politeness, "like you I cannot trifle with my duty. At Saint-Philbert you were only, to me, a suspicious person. I am not a commissary of police, and I was not called upon to interfere with you. Here I find you in flagrant rebellion against the laws, and I arrest you."

"Arrest me! arrest me at this moment! You may kill me, monsieur, but you shall not have, me living!"

And before the officer could recover from his surprise, Bertha climbed the window, sprang into the courtyard, and reached the gate. It was guarded by soldiers. Looking about her the girl saw Michel's horse, which, frightened by the noise and the apparition of the soldiers, had broken loose and was running hither and thither about the yard.

Profiting by the confidence that the officer felt in the precaution taken of

surrounding the house, a security which prevented him from ordering violence against a woman, she went straight to the animal and sprang into the saddle with a bound, then passing like a thunderbolt before the eyes of the amazed officer, she reached a place in the wall which was slightly broken down; there with heel and bridle she urged on the horse, which was an excellent English hunter, made it jump the barrier which was still nearly five feet high, and darted away across the plain.

"Don't fire! don't fire upon that woman!" cried the officer, who did not think the prize worth taking dead if he could not get her living.

But the soldiers who formed the cordon outside the courtyard did not understand the order, and a rain of balls hissed around Bertha as the vigorous stride of her good English beast carried her toward Nantes.

XL.

THE CHIMNEY-BACK.

Let us now see what was happening in Nantes during this night which began with the death of Joseph Picaut, followed by the arrest of Monsieur Michel de la Logerie.

Toward nine o'clock that evening a man with his clothes soaked in water and soiled with mud presented himself at the Prefecture, and on refusal of the usher in charge to take him to the prefect, he sent in to that official a card, bearing, as it appeared, some all-powerful name, for the prefect immediately left his employment to receive this man, who was no other than the one known to us as Monsieur Hyacinthe.

Ten minutes after their interview a strong force of gendarmes and police officers was on its way to the house occupied by Maître Pascal in the rue du Marché, and soon appeared before the door of the house which opened on the street.

No precaution was taken to dull the sound of the column's advance, or to mislead any one as to its intentions; so that Maître Pascal, on becoming aware of its advance, had plenty of time to notice that the door into the alley was not guarded, and to

escape in that way before the emissaries of the law could burst in the door on the rue du Marché, which was not opened to them.

He made at once for the rue du Château and entered No. 3. Monsieur Hyacinthe, whom he had not perceived, hidden as he was behind a stone block near the entrance of the alley, followed him with all the practised skill of a hunter stalking the game he covets.

During this preliminary operation, for the success of which Monsieur Hyacinthe had probably vouched, the authorities had taken strong military measures; and no sooner had the Jew made his report of what he had seen to the prefect of the Loire than twelve hundred men advanced upon the house into which the spy had seen Maître Pascal disappear. These twelve hundred men were divided into three columns. The first went down the Cours, leaving sentinels stationed along the walls of the Archbishop's garden and the adjoining houses, skirted the castle moat and came in front of No. 3 rue du Château, where it deployed. The second, following the rue de l'Evêché, crossed the place Saint-Pierre, went down the main street, and joined the first column by the rue Basse-du-Château. The third united with the two others from the upper end of the rue du Château, leaving, like the others, a long line of sentries with fixed bayonets behind it.

The investment was complete; the whole nest of houses, in the midst of which was No. 3, was securely surrounded.

The troops entered the ground-floor, preceded by the commissaries of police, who marched before them, pistol in hand. The soldiers spread themselves through the house and guarded all the exits; their mission was then fulfilled. That of the police began.

Four ladies were, apparently, the only occupants of the house. These ladies, who belonged to the upper aristocracy of Nantes, and were respected, not only for their social position, but for their honorable characters, were arrested.

Outside the house a crowd gathered, and formed another cordon behind that of the soldiers. The whole town seemed to have turned into the streets; but no sign of royalist sympathy was shown. The crowd was grave and curious, that was all.

Investigations began inside the house; and their first result confirmed the authorities in the conviction that Madame la Duchesse de Berry occupied it. A letter addressed to her Royal Highness was lying open on a table. The disappearance of Maître Pascal, who was seen to enter the house and known not to have left it, proved the existence of some hiding-place within its walls. That hiding-place must be found.

All articles of furniture were opened if the keys were in them; broken open if they were not. The sappers and masons sounded the walls and floors with their hammers; builders, who were taken from room to room, declared it impossible, comparing the internal with the external construction, that any hiding-place was made in the walls. In several of the rooms, however, articles were found, such as printed papers, jewels, articles of silver, which might, to be sure, have belonged to the owners of the house, but, under the circumstances, seemed to point to the presence of the princess within the walls. When the garret was reached the builders declared that there, less than elsewhere, was it possible for a hiding-place to exist.

The police then searched the neighboring houses, sounding the walls with such violence that fragments of masonry were detached, and at one time it was thought that the walls themselves were coming down.

While these things were happening about them the ladies of the house, who were under arrest, showed the greatest coolness; though kept in sight by their guards, they calmly sat down to dinner. Two other women,--and history ought, ere this, to have searched out their names and preserved them for posterity,--two other women were the special objects of police investigation; these women, the servants of the household, named Charlotte Moreau and Marie Boissy, were taken to the castle, thence to the barracks of the gendarmerie, where, finding that they resisted all

threats, an attempt was made to corrupt them. Large and still larger sums of money were offered to them, but they answered steadily that they knew nothing whatever of the Duchesse de Berry.

After these ineffectual efforts the search relaxed; the prefect was the first to retreat, leaving, by way of precaution, a sufficient number of men to guard each room in the house, while the commissaries of police took up their quarters on the ground-floor. The house was still surrounded and the National Guard sent a detachment to relieve the troops of the line, who took a rest.

In distributing sentries, two gendarmes were placed in two attic rooms, which had, of course, been carefully searched. The cold was so sharp that these men suffered from it. One of them went downstairs and returned with an armful of peat-fuel, and ten minutes later a fine fire was blazing in the chimney, the iron back of which was soon red-hot.

Almost at the same time, although it was scarcely daylight, the work of the masons began again; their crow-bars and mallets struck the walls of the attic rooms and made them tremble. In spite of this noisy racket, one of the gendarmes was fast asleep; his companion, now comfortably warm, had ceased to keep up the fire, and the masons, satisfied at last, gave up the search in this part of the house, which, with the instinct of their trade, they had carefully explored.

The gendarme who was awake, profiting by the silence that followed the diabolical uproar which had continued since early on the previous evening, went to sleep himself. His companion soon after waked up cold. His eyes were scarcely open before he thought of warming himself, and relighted the fire; but as the peat did not ignite very readily, he threw into the fireplace a number of copies of the "Quotidienne" which lay pell-mell upon the table. The flames from the newspapers produced a thicker smoke and greater heat than the peat had done at any time. The gendarme, feeling comfortable, was occupying his time by reading the

"Quotidienne," when all of a sudden his pyrotechnic edifice came tumbling clown, and the peat squares which he had set against the chimney-back rolled into the room.

At the same instant he heard from behind that back a noise which gave him an odd idea; he fancied there were rats in the chimney, and that the heat of his fire had forced them to decamp. On this he woke up his comrade, and together they made ready to chase the rodents, sabre in hand.

While their attention was wholly fixed on this new species of game, one of them noticed a decided movement of the chimney-back, and he called out:--

"Who's there?"

A woman's voice replied:--

"We surrender,--we will open the door; put out your fire!"

The two gendarmes jumped to their fire and scattered it out with a few kicks. The chimney-back then slowly turned on a pivot and disclosed a hollow space, from which a woman, bareheaded, her face pale, her hair standing up from her forehead like that of a man, dressed in a simple Neapolitan gown of a brown color, scorched in many places, came forth, placing her feet and hands on the heated hearth.

This woman was Petit-Pierre, her Royal Highness Marie-Caroline, the Duchesse de Berry.

Her companions followed her. For sixteen hours they had been confined in that cramped place without food. The hole which was thus their asylum was made between the flue of the chimney and the wall of the adjoining house under the roof, the rafters of which served to conceal it.

At the moment when the troops surrounded the house her Royal Highness was listening to Maître Pascal, who gave her an amusing account of the scare which had led him to leave his house and come to hers. Through the windows of the room in which she sat the duchess could see the moon rising in the calm sky, and defining,

like a brown silhouette, the massive towers, the silent, motionless towers of the old castle.

There are moments when nature seems so gentle, so friendly, that it is impossible to believe a danger lurks and threatens us from the midst of such perfect quietude.

Suddenly Maître Pascal, coming nearer to the window, saw the flash of bayonets. Instantly he threw himself back, exclaiming:--

"Escape! save yourself, Madame!"

The duchess at once rushed up the staircase, the others following her. Reaching the hiding-place, she turned and called to her companions. As they knew the place could only be entered on their hands and knees, the men went first; then, as the young lady who attended on her Royal Highness was unwilling to pass before her, the duchess said, laughing:--

"Go in, go in! Good strategy requires that when a retreat is made the commander should always be in the rear."

The soldiers entered the door of the house just as that of the hiding-place was closed on the princess and her friends.

We have seen with what minute care the search had been made. Every blow struck on the walls resounded in the refuge of the duchess; the plaster fell in showers, the bricks were loosened, and the prisoners came near being buried in the mass of rubbish shaken down by the jar of the hammers and the iron-bars and joists of the searchers. When the gendarmes built their fire the back of the chimney and the wall gave forth a heat which made the little chamber almost insupportable. After a while those who were imprisoned in it could scarcely breathe, and they would have perished asphyxiated if they had not succeeded in getting a few slates off the roof, which made an opening that let in air.

The duchess suffered the most; for, having entered last, she was nearest to the chimney-back. Each of her companions begged her to change places, but she would

not consent to it. To the danger of being suffocated was now added that of being burned alive. The door of the hiding-place was red-hot, and threatened at every moment to set fire to the clothing of the women. In fact, Madame's gown had been twice on fire and she had put it out with her hands, which were badly burned; the scars remained visible for many months.

Every minute exhausted the interior air, and the external air admitted through the tiny holes did not suffice to renew it. The breathing of the prisoners became more and more difficult; another ten minutes in that furnace might sacrifice the future life of the duchess. Her companions implored her to surrender; but she would not. Her eyes filled with tears of anger, which the scorching air dried upon her cheeks. The fire had again caught her gown and again she had extinguished it; but in the movement she thus made she chanced to touch the spring of the chimney-back, which moved and attracted the attention of the gendarme.

Supposing that this accident had betrayed her retreat, and pitying the sufferings of her companions, Madame consented to surrender, leaving the chimney as we have related. Her first words were a request to see General Dermoncourt. One of the gendarmes went to find him on the ground-floor, which he had not chosen to leave throughout the search.

XLI.

THREE BROKEN HEARTS.

As soon as the general's arrival was announced, Madame went hastily toward him.

"General," she said quickly, "I surrender to you; and I trust to your loyalty!"

"Madame," replied Dermoncourt, "your Royal Highness is under the safeguard of French honor!"

He led her to a chair, and as she seated herself she pressed his arm firmly and said:--

"General, I have nothing to reproach myself with. I have done my duty as a mother

to recover my son's inheritance."

Her voice was clear and accentuated. Though pale, she was excited as if by fever. The general sent for a glass of water, in which she dipped her fingers; the refreshing coolness calmed her.

During this time the prefect and the commander of the National Guard were notified of what had happened. The prefect was the first to arrive. He entered the room in which Madame was sitting, with his hat on his head, ignoring that a woman was a prisoner there,--a woman whose rank and whose misfortunes deserved more respect than had ever been shown her.

He approached the duchess, looked at her, touched his hat cavalierly, and said:--

"Yes, that is really she."

Then he went out to give some orders.

"Who is that man?" asked the princess.

The question was a natural one, for the prefect had presented himself without any of the distinctive signs of his high administrative position.

"Madame can surely guess," said the general.

She looked at him with a slight laugh.

"I suppose it must be the prefect," she said.

"Madame could not have been more correct had she seen his license."

"Did that man serve under the Restoration?"

"No, Madame."

"I am glad for the Restoration."

The prefect now returned, entering without being announced, as before; and, as before, he did not remove his hat. Apparently, the prefect was hungry on that particular morning, for he brought with him, on a plate which he held in his hand, a

slice of pâté. He put the plate on the table, asked for a knife and fork, and began to eat with his back to the princess.

Madame looked at him with an expression of mingled anger and contempt.

"General," she said, "do you know what I most regret in the station I once occupied?"

"No, Madame."

"Two ushers, to turn that man out."

When the prefect had finished his repast he turned round and asked the duchess for her papers.

Madame replied that he could look in her late hiding-place, where he would find a white portfolio she had left there.

The prefect went to fetch the portfolio and brought it back with him.

"Monsieur," said the duchess, opening it, "the papers in this portfolio are of very little consequence; but I wish to give them to you myself in order that I may explain their ownership."

So saying, she gave him one after the other the things that were in the portfolio.

"Does Madame know how much money she has here?" asked the prefect.

"Monsieur, there ought to be about thirty-six thousand francs; of which twelve thousand belong to persons whom I will designate."

The general here approached and said that if Madame felt better it was urgent that she should leave the house.

"To go where?" she said, looking at him fixedly.

"To the castle, Madame."

"Ah, yes, and from there to Blaye, no doubt?"

"General," said one of Madame's companions, "her Royal Highness cannot go on

foot; it would not be proper."

"Monsieur," replied Dermoncourt, "a carriage would only encumber us. Madame can go on foot by throwing a mantle over her shoulders and wearing a hat."

On this the general's secretary and the prefect, who seemed to be suddenly pricked by gallantry, went down stairs and returned with three hats. The princess chose a black one, because, as she said, the color was analogous to the circumstances; after which she took the general's arm to leave the house. As she passed before the door of the garret she gave a glance at the chimney-back, which remained open.

"Ah, general!" she said, laughing, "if you had not treated me as they treated Saint Lawrence,--which by the bye is quite unworthy of your military generosity,--you wouldn't have me under your arm, now. Come, friends," she added, addressing her companions.

The princess went down the staircase on the general's arm. As she was about to cross the threshold into the street she heard a great noise among the crowd, who flocked behind the soldiers and formed a line ten times as deep as that of the military.

Madame may have thought that those cries and shouts were aimed at her; but she gave no sign of fear except that she pressed a little closer to the general's arm.

When the princess advanced between the double line of soldiers and National Guards, who made a lane from the house to the castle, the cries and mutterings she had heard became louder and more violent than before. The general cast his eyes in the direction from which the tumult chiefly came, and there he saw a young peasant-woman trying to force her way through the ranks of the soldiers who opposed her passage; and yet, being struck by her beauty and the despair that was visible on her face, were refraining from violence in repulsing her.

Dermoncourt recognized Bertha, and called the duchess's attention to her. The latter gave a cry.

"General," she said eagerly, "you have promised not to separate me from my friends;

let that young girl come to me."

On a sign from the general the ranks opened, and Bertha reached the august prisoner.

"Pardon, Madame! pardon for an unhappy woman who might have saved you, and did not! Oh, I would I could die, cursing that fatal love which has made me the involuntary accomplice of the traitors who have sold your Royal Highness!"

"I don't know what you mean, Bertha!" interrupted the princess, raising the young girl and giving her the arm that was free. "What you are doing at this moment proves that whatever else has happened I cannot doubt a devotion the memory of which will never leave me. But I have to talk to you of other things, dear child. I have to ask your pardon for contributing to an error which may, perhaps, have made you most unhappy; I have to tell you that--"

"I know all, Madame," said Bertha, lifting her eyes, that were red with tears, to the princess.

"Poor child!" exclaimed the duchess, pressing the girl's hand. "Then, follow me, come with me; time and my affection will calm a sorrow that I comprehend, that I respect--"

"I beg your Highness to forgive me for not obeying her, but I have made a vow which I must fulfil. God alone is placed by duty above my princess."

"Then go, dear child!" said Madame, comprehending the young girl's meaning. "Go, and may the God you seek be with you! When you pray to Him remember Petit-Pierre; the prayers of a broken heart ascend to Him."[3]

They had now reached the gates of the prison. The duchess raised her eyes to the blackened walls of the old castle; then she held out her hand to Bertha, who, kneeling down, laid a kiss upon it, murmuring once more the words, "Forgive me!" Then Madame, after an instant's hesitation, passed through the postern, giving a last smile in token of farewell to Bertha.

The general withdrew his arm from the duchess to allow her to pass in; then he turned hastily to Bertha and said in a low voice:--

"Where is your father?"

"He is at Nantes."

"Tell him to return to the château, and stay there quietly; he shall not be disturbed. I'll break my sword sooner than allow him to be arrested, my old enemy!"

"Thank you for him, general."

"And you, if you have any need of my services, command them, mademoiselle."

"I want a passport to Paris."

"When?"

"At once."

"Where shall I send it to you?"

"To the other side of the pont Rousseau; to the inn of the Point du Jour."

Chateau of Nantes

"In an hour you shall have it, mademoiselle."

With a sign of farewell the general turned and disappeared beneath the gloomy portal.

Bertha worked her way through the close-pressed ranks of the crowd until she reached the nearest church, which she entered. There she remained a long time kneeling on the cold stone pavement.

When she rose the stones were wet with tears.

Then she crossed the town and the pont Rousseau. Approaching the inn of the Point du Jour, she saw her father sitting at the threshold of the door. Within the last few hours the Marquis de Souday had aged ten years; his eye had lost the humorous, bantering look which gave it such expression; he carried his head low, like a man

whose burden was too heavy for him.

Warned by the priest who had received the last confession of Maître Jacques, and who went to the forest of Touvois to tell the marquis what had happened, the old man started at once for Nantes. A mile from the pont Rousseau he met Bertha, whose horse had fallen, having broken a tendon in the furious pace to which she had urged him.

The girl confessed to her father what had happened. The old man did not reproach her, but he broke the stick he held in his hand against the stones of the road.

When they reached the pont Rousseau public rumor informed them, though it was only seven in the morning, of the arrest of the princess before that arrest was actually accomplished. Bertha, not daring to raise her eyes to her father, rushed toward Nantes; the old man seated himself on the bench before the inn, where we find him four hours later.

This sorrow was the only one against which his selfish and epicurean philosophy was impotent. He would have pardoned his daughter many faults; but he could not think without despair that she had covered his name with the crime and shame of lèze-chivalry, and that a Souday, the last of the name, should have helped to fling royalty into the gulf.

When Bertha approached him he silently held out to her a paper a gendarme had given him. It was her passport from the general.

"Father, will you not forgive me as she forgave me?" said the girl, in a gentle, humble tone which contrasted strangely with her self-assuming manner in other days.

The old gentleman sadly shook his head.

"Where shall I find my poor Jean Oullier?" he said. "Since God has preserved him to me I want to see him. I want him to go with me out of this country!"

"Will you leave Souday, father?"

"Yes."

"Where will you go?"

"Where I can hide my name."

"And Mary, poor Mary, who is innocent!"

"Mary will be the wife of the man who is the cause of this execrable crime. I will never see Mary again!"

"You will be alone."

"No; I shall have Jean Oullier."

Bertha bowed her head; she entered the inn, where she changed her peasant dress for mourning garments, which she had bought on her way through the town. When she came out the old man had gone. Looking about her she saw him, with his hands clasped behind his back, his head sunk on his breast, sadly walking in the direction of Saint-Philbert.

Bertha sobbed; then she cast a lingering look at the verdant plain of the Retz region, which can be seen in the distance from Nantes, backed by the dark-blue line of the forest of Machecoul.

"Farewell, all that I love in this world!" she cried.

Then she turned and re-entered the town of Nantes.

XLII.

GOD'S EXECUTIONER.

During the three hours that Courtin spent bound hand and foot, and lying on the earth in the ruins of Saint-Philbert, side by side with the corpse of Joseph Picaut, his heart passed through all the agony that can rend and torture a human being.

He felt the precious belt beneath him, for he had managed to lie upon it; but the gold

it contained only added more pangs to his other pangs, more terror to the countless terrors which assailed his brain. That gold, which was more to him than life itself, was he doomed to lose it? Who was this unknown man whom he had heard Maître Jacques tell the widow to summon? What was this mysterious vengeance he had now to fear? He passed in review before him all the persons to whom, in the course of his life, he had done harm; the list was long, and their threatening faces peopled the darkness of the tower.

And yet, at times, a ray of hope traversed his gloomy mind; vague and undecided at first, it presently took on consistency. Could it be that a man possessing that glorious gold should die? If vengeance rose before him would not a handful of those coins silence it? His imagination counted and re-counted the sum belonging to him, which was really, really his own, which was bruising his flesh delightfully, pressing into his loins as if the gold itself were becoming a part of his very body. Then he reflected that if he could only escape he should add fifty thousand more francs to the fifty thousand now beneath him; and, helpless as he was, a victim doomed to death, awaiting the fall of the sword of Damocles above his head, which might at any instant cut the thread of his life, his heart melted into such joy that it took the character of intoxication. But soon his ideas again changed their course. He asked himself if his accomplice--in whom he felt only the confidence of an accomplice--would not profit by his absence to cheat him of the share that belonged to him; he saw that man escaping, weighed down by the weight of the enormous sum he was carrying, and refusing to divide it with him, who, after all, had done the whole betrayal. He mentally prepared for such occasion; he thought of words of entreaty to reach the heart of that Jew, threats to intimidate him, reproaches that might move him; but suddenly, when he reflected that if Monsieur Hyacinthe loved gold as he loved it,--which was probable, inasmuch as he was a Jew,--when he measured his associate by his own measure, when he sounded in his own soul the depths of the sacrifice he demanded, he said to himself that tears, prayers, threats,

reproaches would all be useless, and he fell into paroxysms of rage; he vented roars which shook the old arches of the feudal edifice; he struggled in his bonds, he bit the ropes, he tried to tear them with his teeth; but those ropes, slender and loosely twisted as they were, seemed to take on life, to become living things under his efforts; he fancied he felt them struggling against him, increasing their tangled snarl; the knots he undid seemed to tie themselves again, not singly as before, but in double, treble, quadruple turns; and then, as if to punish his efforts, they buried themselves in his flesh, where they made a burning furrow. All dreams of hope, all thought of riches and happiness vanished like clouds before the breath of a tempest; the phantoms of those whom the farmer had persecuted rose terrible before him; all things lurking in the shadow, stones, beams, fragments of broken wood-work, fallen cornices, all took form, and each of those threatening shapes looked at him with eyes which shone in the darkness like thousands of sparks darting on the tissue of a black shroud. The mind of the wretched man began to wander. Mad with terror and despair he called to the corpse of Joseph Picaut, of which he could see the outline, stiff and stark, about four feet from him; he offered him a fourth, a third, a half of his gold if he would loose his bonds; but the echo of the arches alone replied in its funereal voice, and, exhausted by emotion, he fell back for a moment into dull insensibility.

He was in one of these moments of torpor when a noise without made him quiver. Some one was walking in the inner courtyard of the castle, and presently he heard the grinding of the rusty bolts of the old fruit-room. Courtin's heart beat as though it would burst his breast. He was breathless with fear, choking with anguish; he felt that the coming person was the avenger summoned by Maître Jacques.

The door opened. The flame of a torch lighted the rafters with its ruddy glare. Courtin had an instant of hope; it was the widow, bearing the torch, whom he first saw, and he thought she was alone; but she had scarcely made two steps into the tower before a man who was behind her appeared. The hair of the hapless farmer

rose on his head; he dared not look at the man; he closed his eyes and was silent.

The man and the widow came nearer. Marianne gave the torch to her companion, pointing with her finger to Courtin; and then, as if indifferent to what was about to happen, she knelt down at the feet of Joseph Picaut's body and began to pray.

As for the man, he came close beside the farmer and, no doubt to convince himself that he was really the mayor of La Logerie, he cast the light of the torch across his face.

"Can he be asleep?" he said to himself, in a low voice. "No, he is too great a coward to sleep; no, his face is too pale--he's not sleeping."

Then he stuck his torch into a fissure in the wall, sat down on an enormous stone which had rolled from the top to the middle of the tower and, addressing Courtin, said to him:--

"Come, open your eyes, Monsieur le maire. We have something to say to each other, and I like to see the eyes of those who speak to me."

"Jean Oullier!" cried Courtin, turning livid, and making a desperate effort to burst his bonds and escape. "Jean Oullier living!"

"If it were only his ghost, Monsieur Courtin, it would be, I think, enough to terrify you; for you have a long account to settle with him."

"Oh, my God! my God!" exclaimed Courtin, letting himself drop back on the ground like a man who resigns himself to his fate.

"Our hatred dates far back, doesn't it?" continued Jean Oullier; "and its instincts have not misled us; they have embittered you against me, and to-day, exhausted and half dead as I am, they have brought me back to you."

"I have never hated you," said Courtin, who the moment he perceived that Jean Oullier was not about to kill him on the spot, felt a gleam of hope in his heart and foresaw the possibility of saving his life by discussion. "I have never hated you; on

the contrary! and if my ball did strike you it was not because I meant it for you. I did not know you were in that bush."

"Oh, my grievances against you go farther back than that, Monsieur Courtin!"

"Farther back?" replied Courtin, who, little by little, was recovering some energy. "But I swear that before that accident, which I deplore, I never put you in any danger, I never did you any harm."

"Your memory is short, and your offences weigh most on the soul of the offended person, it appears; for I remember the wrongs you have done me."

"What wrongs? What can you remember against me? Speak, Monsieur Jean Oullier! Do you think it right to kill a man without hearing him, without allowing him to say one word in his defence?"

"Who told you I meant to kill you?" said Jean Oullier, with the icy calmness he had not quitted for an instant. "Your conscience, perhaps."

"Speak out, Monsieur Jean! tell me of what I am accused! Except for that luckless shot, I know I am as white as the driven snow. Yes, I can prove to you that no one has been a better friend than I to the worthy family at Souday; no one has respected them more, or been more glad of this marriage which is to unite the families of your master and mine."

"Monsieur Courtin," said Jean Oullier, who had left free course to this flux of words, "it is, as you say, only fair that an accused person should defend himself. Defend yourself, therefore, if you can. Listen to me; I begin--"

"Oh, go on! I am not afraid of your questions!" replied Courtin.

"We shall soon see that. Who betrayed me to the gendarmes at the fair of Montaigu, so as to lay hands more securely on my master's guests, whom you rightly supposed I was defending? Who, having done that, basely hid himself behind the hedge of the last garden in Montaigu, and after borrowing a gun of the owner of that garden, fired

at my dog and killed my poor companion? Answer, Monsieur Courtin!"

"Who dares to say he saw me do that?" cried the farmer.

"Three persons; among them the man from whom you borrowed the gun."

"How should I know the dog was yours? No, Monsieur Jean, upon my honor, I was ignorant of it."

Jean made a contemptuous gesture.

"Who," he continued, in the same calm but accusing voice, "who, having slipped into Pascal Picaut's house, sold to the Blues the secret he discovered there,--the secret of a sacred hospitality?"

"I bear testimony to that," said the deep voice of Pascal's widow, issuing from her silence and immobility.

The farmer shuddered and dared not defend himself.

"Whom have I constantly found," resumed Jean Oullier, "during the last four months, busy with shameful schemes, laying his plots and sheltering them under the name of his young master, proclaiming devotion and fidelity to him, and soiling the very name of those virtues by contact with his criminal intentions? Whom did I hear, on the Bouaimé moor, discussing the price of blood? Whom did I see weighing the gold offered him for the basest and most odious of treacheries? Who, I say, was that man, if not you?"

"I swear to you by all there is most sacred among men!" said Courtin, who still believed that Jean Oullier's principal grievance was the shot that wounded him. "I swear to you that I did not know you were in that luckless bush!"

"But I tell you I don't blame you for that! I have not said a word, I have not opened my lips to you about it! The list of your crimes is long enough without adding that!"

"You speak of my crimes, Jean Oullier, and you forget that my young master, who will soon become yours, owes me his life; and that if I had been the traitor that you

call me I should have delivered him up to the soldiers who passed and repassed my house every day while he was there. You forget all that, while, on the contrary, you rake up every trifling circumstance against me."

"If you did save your master," continued Jean Oullier, in the same inexorable tone, "it is because that sham devotion was useful to your plans. Better for him, better for those two poor girls, if you had let them end their days honorably, gloriously, than to have mixed them up in these shameless intrigues. That is what I have against you, Courtin; that thought alone doubles the hatred I feel to you."

"The proof that I don't hate you, Jean Oullier, is that if I had chosen you would long ago have been put out of this world."

"What do you mean?"

"On the day of that hunt when the father of Monsieur Michel was killed--murdered, Monsieur Jean, we won't blink the word--a beater was not ten paces from him; and the name of that beater was Courtin."

Jean Oullier rose to his full height.

"Yes," continued the farmer, "and this beater saw it was Jean Oullier's ball that brought the traitor down."

"Yes," said Jean Oullier; "but it was not a crime it was an expiation. I am proud to have been the man whom God selected to punish that criminal."

"God alone may punish, God alone may curse," said the mayor.

"No, I am not mistaken; it is He who has put into my heart this hatred of sin, this ineradicable recollection of treachery; it was the finger of God touching my heart when that heart quivered at the name of the traitor. When my shot struck that Judas I felt the breath of the divine Justice cross my face and cool it; and, from that moment to this I have found the peace and calmness I never had while that unpunished criminal prospered before my eyes. God was with me."

"God is never with a murderer."

"God is always with the executioner who lifts the sword of justice. Men have their laws, He has his. I was that day, as I am to-day, the sword of God."

"Do you mean to murder me as you murdered Baron Michel?"

"I mean to punish the man who sold Petit-Pierre as I punished him who sold Charette. I shall punish him without fear, without doubt, without remorse."

"Take care; remorse will come when your future master calls you to account for his father's death."

"That young man is just and loyal; if he is ever called upon to judge my conduct I shall tell him what I saw in the wood of La Chabotière, and he will judge me rightly."

"Who can testify that you tell the truth? One man alone, and that is I. Let me live, Jean, let me live! and, as that woman did just now, I will rise and say: 'I bear testimony to that.'"

"Fear makes you foolish, Courtin. Monsieur Michel will ask for no other testimony when Jean Oullier says, 'This is the truth;' when Jean Oullier, baring his breast, says, 'If you wish to avenge your father, strike!' when Jean Oullier kneels before him and prays to God to send the expiation if He himself judges that the deed should be expiated. No, no! and you are wrong, wrong to evoke in your terror those bloody memories before my mind. You, Maître Courtin, you have done worse things than Michel did; for the blood you sold is nobler still than that he trafficked in. I did not spare Michel, why should I spare you? Never, never!"

"Pity! mercy! Jean Oullier. Do not kill me!" sobbed the wretched man.

"Implore those stones, ask pity of them! They may answer you; but nothing can move my will, or shake my resolution. You shall die!"

"Ah, my God! my God!" cried Courtin, "is there no one to help me? Widow Picaut!

widow Picaut! here! here! will you let him cut my throat? Here! help me! protect me! If you want gold, I'll give it! I have gold, gold! No, what am I saying? My mind is wandering; I have no gold!" said the poor wretch, fearing to spur on the murder he saw glittering in the eyes of his enemy if he offered such hopes. "No, I have no gold, but I have property, estates. I'll give you all; I'll make you rich--both of you! Oh, mercy, Jean Oullier! Widow Picaut, defend me!"

The widow did not stir; except for the movement of her lips she might have been taken, as she knelt there in her mourning garments, pale as marble, mute and motionless beside the corpse, for one of those kneeling statues we often see at the foot of some ancient monument.

"What!" continued Courtin, "will you really kill me? kill me without a fight, without danger, when I cannot lift a foot to escape or a hand to defend myself? Will you cut my throat in my bonds like a beast that they drag to a slaughter-house? Oh, Jean Oullier, that's not the work of a soldier; you are a butcher!"

"Who told you I would do it thus? No, no, no, Maître Courtin. Look, the wound you gave me has not healed; it still bleeds. I am weak, tottering, feeble; I am proscribed, a price is on my head!--well, in spite of all that, I am so certain of the justice of my cause that I do not hesitate to appeal to the judgment of God. Courtin, you are free!"

"Free?"

"Yes, I set you at liberty. Oh, you need not thank me; what I do, I do for myself, not you,--that it may never be said Jean Oullier struck a fallen man, an unarmed man. But don't mistake; the life I give you now, I will take some day."

"Oh, God!"

"Maître Courtin, you will go from here unbound and free; but, I warn you, beware! As soon as you have passed the threshold of these ruins I shall be upon your traces; and those traces I will never abandon until I have struck you down and made your body a corpse. Beware, Maître Courtin, beware!"

So saying, Jean Oullier took his knife and cut the cords that bound the farmer hand and foot. Courtin made a bound of almost frantic joy; but he instantly controlled it. In springing up he felt the belt; it seemed as though it called to him. Jean Oullier had given him life, but what was life without his gold?

He flung himself down upon it as quickly as he had risen.

Jean Oullier had seen, rapid as Courtin's movement was, the swollen leather of the belt, and he guessed what was passing in the farmer's mind.

"Why don't you go?" he said. "What are you waiting for? Yes, I understand; you are afraid that, seeing you free as myself and stronger than I, my wrath may revive; you are afraid I may throw you another knife like my own and say to you: 'Defend yourself, Maître Courtin, we are equal now!' No, Jean Oullier has but one word, and that he has given you. Make haste! depart! fly! If God is with you, He will protect you against me; if He condemns you, what care I for the start I give you? Take your cursèd gold, and begone!"

Maître Courtin did not answer. He rose, stumbling like a drunken man; he tried to fasten the belt around his waist, but could not; his fingers trembled as though they were shaken by an ague. Before departing he kept himself turned in terror toward Jean Oullier. The traitor feared treachery; he could not believe that the generosity of his enemy did not hide some trap.

Jean Oullier pointed with his finger to the door. Courtin rushed into the court; but before he reached the postern-gate he heard the voice of the Vendéan, sonorous as the clarion of battle, calling to him:--

"Beware, Courtin! beware!"

Maître Courtin, free as he was, shuddered; and in that moment of agitation he struck his foot against a stone, tripped, and fell forward. He uttered a cry of agony, fancying that the Vendéan was upon him; he thought he felt the cold steel of a knife piercing between his shoulders.

It was only an omen. Courtin rose, and a minute later, having passed the postern, he darted, a free man, into the open country he had not expected to see again.

When he had disappeared the widow went up to Jean Oullier and offered him her hand.

"Jean," she said, "as I listened to you, I thought how right my Pascal was when he told me there were brave, strong souls under every flag."

Jean Oullier wrung the hand the worthy woman who had saved his life held out to him.

"How do you feel now?" she asked.

"Better; we are always stronger for a struggle."

"And where are you going?"

"To Nantes. After what your mother told us, I think Bertha may not have gone there; and I fear some disaster from the delay."

"Well, at any rate, take a boat; that will spare your legs the fatigue of half the distance."

"I will," replied Jean Oullier.

And he followed the widow to the place on the lakeside where the boats of the fishermen were drawn up on the sand.

XLIII.

SHOWS THAT A MAN WITH FIFTY THOUSAND FRANCS ABOUT HIM MAY BE MUCH EMBARRASSED.

As soon as Maître Courtin had crossed the bridge leading from the castle he began to run like a madman; terror lent him wings. He did not ask himself whither his steps led him; he fled to flee. If his strength had equalled his fear he would have put the world between himself and the threats of the Vendéan,--threats he continued to hear

resounding in his ears like a funeral knell.

But after he had done about a couple of miles across country in the direction of Machecoul, exhausted, breathless, choked by the rapidity of his flight, he fell rather than seated himself on the bank of a ditch, where he came to his senses and began to reflect on what he had better do. His first idea was to go at once to his own house; but that idea he almost immediately abandoned. In the country, no matter what effort the authorities might make to protect the mayor of La Logerie, Jean Oullier--with his relations to the country-people and his perfect knowledge of roads, forests, and gorse moors, seconded by the sympathy that the whole community felt for him, and by the hatred they felt for Courtin--was all-powerful, and the game would be wholly on his side.

In Nantes alone could the farmer find refuge,--Nantes, where an able and numerous police would protect his life until such time as they could arrest Jean Oullier,--a result Courtin hoped to reach very soon by the information he was able to give as to the usual hiding-places of the insurrectionists.

As he sat there thinking these things his hand went to his belt to lift it; the weight of the mass of gold he carried hurt him, and had contributed not a little to the breathless fatigue of his hard run. That gesture decided his fate.

Surely he should find Monsieur Hyacinthe in Nantes. The thought of receiving from his associate, if their plot had succeeded (and this he did not doubt), an equal sum to that he carried, filled Courtin's heart with a joy that put him far above the tribulations he had lately undergone. He did not hesitate another moment, but turned at once in the direction of the town.

He resolved on getting there as the crow flies, across country. On the road he risked being watched; chance alone could put Jean Oullier on his traces if he kept to the plain. But his imagination, heated by the terrible vicissitudes of the night, was more powerful than his common-sense. No matter how carefully he glided beside the

hedges, crouching in the shadows and stifling the sound of his steps, not daring to enter any field until certain it was deserted, a panic fear pursued him all the way.

In the trees with their pruned heads, which rose above the hedges, his fancy saw assassins; in their knotty branches extending above him, arms and hands with daggers ready to strike him. He stopped, chilled with fear; his legs refused to carry him farther, as though they were rooted to the ground; an icy sweat burst from his body; his teeth chattered convulsively; his shaking fingers clutched his gold, and it took him a long time to recover from his terror. He could not endure to continue in the fields, and made for the high-road.

Besides, he reflected that he might meet a vehicle of some kind on its way to Nantes and obtain a seat in it, which would shorten the way and also protect him.

After taking about five hundred steps he came out upon the road which follows for over a mile the shores of the lake of Grand-Lieu, to which it serves as a species of dike.

Courtin stopped every few minutes to listen; and presently he fancied he heard the trot of a horse's feet. He flung himself into the reeds which bordered the road on the lakeside, and crouched there, again enduring all the agonies of mind which we have just described.

But he now heard oars to his left dipping softly in the water. He crept through the reeds to look in the direction of the sound, and saw, in the shadow, a boat gliding slowly past the shore. It was, no doubt, some fisherman, intending to gather in his nets before daybreak.

The horse came nearer; the ring of his hoofs on the stones of the road terrified Courtin; danger was there, there! and he must flee from it. He whistled softly to attract the attention of the fisherman. The latter stopped rowing.

"This way! this way!" cried Courtin.

He had scarcely said the words before a vigorous stroke of the oars sent the boat

within four feet of the fugitive.

"Can you put me across the lake and take me as far as Port-Saint-Martin?" asked Courtin. "I'll pay you a franc for it."

The fisherman, who was wrapped in a sort of pea-jacket, with a hood which concealed his face, answered only by a nod; but he did better than reply. Using his boat-hook he drove the wherry in among the reeds, which bent and quivered under its prow; and just as the horse whose coming had so terrified Maître Courtin reached the point in the road he had lately left, the latter, with two springs, gained the boat and was safely in it.

The fisherman, as though he had shared his passenger's apprehensions, turned the boat toward the middle of the lake, while Courtin gave a sigh of relief. At the end of ten minutes the road and the trees that bordered it seemed merely a line upon the horizon.

Courtin could scarcely contain himself for joy. The boat, which some fortunate chance had brought to that spot, would enable him to crown his hopes and fulfil all wishes. Once at Port-Saint-Martin, he had only a three-mile walk to Nantes over a road frequented at every hour of the day or night; and once in Nantes he was safe.

Courtin's joy was so great that, in spite of himself, and as an effect of the reaction of his terror, he felt impelled to some outward manifestation of it. Sitting in the stern of the boat, he looked excitedly at the fisherman, as the latter bent to his oars and put at every stroke a stretch of water between him and danger. Those strokes, he counted them aloud; then he laughed a hollow laugh, fingered his belt, and made the gold slip forward and back inside it. This was not mere joy--it was intoxication.

Presently, however, he began to think the fisherman had gone far enough from the shore, and that it was high time to turn the boat's head to Port-Saint-Martin, which they were now leaving behind them on their right. He waited a few minutes, thinking it might be a man[oe]uvre of the fisherman's to catch some current of which

he would take advantage. But still the fisherman rowed on and on towards the middle of the lake.

"Hey, gars," cried the farmer at last, "you can't have heard me rightly; you are making for Port-Saint-Père, and I told you Port-Saint-Martin. Go the way I told you, and you'll earn your money sooner!"

The fisherman was silent.

"Did you hear me? What are you about?" cried Courtin, impatiently. "Port-Saint-Martin, I say! Go to your right! It is very well not to keep too near the shore, out of reach of balls in these queer times; but I wish you to go in that direction if you please."

The boatman appeared not to hear him.

"Ah, ça! are you deaf?" exclaimed the farmer, beginning to get angry.

The fisherman replied only by a vigorous stroke of his oars, which sent the boat flying several paces farther out on the surface of the lake.

Courtin, beside himself, sprang to the bow, knocked off the hood which in the darkness concealed the fisherman's head, put his own face close to the man's face, and then, with a stifled cry, fell on his knees at the bottom of the boat.

The man let go his oars, but did not rise.

"God has spoken, Maître Courtin," he said; "His judgment is against you! I was not seeking you, but He sends you to me; I had forgotten you for a time, and He puts you in my way. God wills that you shall die, Maître Courtin."

"No, no, no! you won't kill me, Jean Oullier!" cried the wretched man, falling back into all his terrors.

"I will kill you as surely as those stars which are in the sky were placed there by God's hand. Therefore, if you have a soul, think of it; repent, and pray that your doom may not be too severe."

"Oh, you cannot do it, you will not do it, Jean Oullier! Think that you are killing a child of the good God, whose name you speak! Oh, not to tread the earth again, which is so beautiful in the sunlight! to sleep in an icy bed away forever from those I love! Oh, no, no, no! it is impossible!"

"If you were a father, if you had wife, mother, or sister expecting your return, your words might touch me; but no! useless among men, you have lived only to use them, and to return them evil for good. You blaspheme even now in lying, for you love no one. No one has ever loved you on this earth, and my knife will wound no heart but your own in killing you. Maître Courtin, you are now to appear before your Judge; once more, I say, commend your soul to Him."

"Can a few short moments suffice for that? A guilty man like me needs time, needs years of repentance to equal his crimes. You who are so pious, Jean Oullier, you will surely leave me time to sorrow for my sins."

"No; life would only enable you to commit others. Death is expiation; you fear it. Put your fears and your anguish at the feet of the Lord, and He will receive you in His mercy. Maître Courtin, time is passing, and as true as God is there above those stars, in ten minutes you will be before Him!"

"Ten minutes, my God! ten minutes! Oh, pity! pity! mercy!"

"The time you employ in useless prayers is lost to your soul; think of that, Maître Courtin, think of that!"

Courtin did not answer; his hand had touched an oar, and a gleam of hope came into his mind. He gently seized it; then rising abruptly, he aimed a blow at the head of the Vendéan. The latter threw himself to the right and evaded it; the oar fell on the forward gunwale and was shivered into a thousand bits, leaving but a fragment in the farmer's hand.

Quick as lightning Jean Oullier sprang at Courtin's throat. Again the hapless man fell on his knees. Paralyzed by fear he rolled to the bottom of the boat; his choking voice

could scarcely murmur the cry for "Mercy! mercy!"

"Ha, the fear of death did awaken a spark of courage in you!" cried Jean Oullier. "Ha, you found a weapon! Well, so much the better,--so much the better! Defend yourself, Courtin; and if the weapon you hold in your hand doesn't suit you, take mine!" continued the old keeper, flinging his knife at the other's feet.

But Courtin was incapable of seizing it; all movement had become impossible to him. He stammered a few incoherent words; his whole body trembled as though he was shaken by an ague; his ears hummed and all his senses seemed to leave him in his awful dread of death.

"My God!" cried Jean Oullier, pushing the inert mass before him with his foot, "my God! I cannot put my knife into that dead body."

He looked about him as if in search of something.

Nature was calm; the night silent; the breeze scarcely ruffled the surface of the lake; the undulation of the water rippled softly against the sides of the boat; nothing was heard but the cry of the water-fowl flying eastward, their wings dotting with black the crimson lines of the dawn as it slowly ascended heavenward.

Jean Oullier turned abruptly to Courtin and shook him by the arm.

"Maître Courtin, I will not kill you without taking my share of the danger," he said. "Maître Courtin, I will force you to defend yourself; if not against me, at least against death. Death is coming, it is here; defend yourself!"

The farmer answered only by a moan. He rolled his haggard eyes about him, but it was plain he could not distinguish the objects that surrounded him. Death, terrible, hideous, menacing, effaced all else.

At the same instant Jean Oullier gave a vigorous stamp with his heel on the bottom of the boat. The rotten planks gave way and the water entered, boiling and foaming, into the boat.

Courtin was roused by the coldness of the flood as it reached him; he gave an awful cry,--a cry in which there was nothing human.

"I am lost!" he screamed.

"It is God's judgment!" said Jean Oullier, stretching his arm to heaven. "Once I did not strike you because you were bound; this time, my hand spares you again, Maître Courtin. If your good angel wants you, let him save you; I have not stained my hands with your blood."

Courtin had risen while Jean Oullier said these words, and he moved hither and thither in the boat, making the water plash about him. Jean Oullier, calm, impassible, knelt in the bow and prayed.

The water came higher and higher.

"Oh, who will save me? who will save me?" cried Courtin, now livid, and contemplating with terror the six inches of wood which alone remained above the surface of the lake.

"God, if it pleases Him! Your life, like mine, is in His hands; let Him take one or the other--or save, or condemn us both. We are in His hands; once more, Maître Courtin, I say to you, accept His will."

As Jean Oullier spoke the boat gave a lurch; the water had reached the level of the gunwale, the skiff whirled once round, sustained itself for a second on the surface, and then slowly sank beneath the feet of the two men and buried itself in the depths of the lake with dismal mutterings.

Courtin was dragged down by the suction of the boat; but he came to the surface of the water, and his fingers seized the second oar, which floated near him. This slender bit of light dry wood supported him on the water long enough for him to make another appeal to Jean Oullier. The latter did not answer; he was swimming gently in the direction of the dawn.

"Help! help!" cried the miserable Courtin. "Help me to get ashore, Jean Oullier, and I will give you all the gold I have upon me!"

"Throw that ill-gotten gold to the bottom of the lake!" said the Vendéan, seeing the farmer buoyed upon the oar. "That is your one chance of saving your life; and this advice is the only help I will give you!"

Courtin put his hand to the belt; but drew it back as though his fingers were burned by the contact, or as if the Vendéan had commanded him to rip open his bowels and sacrifice his flesh and blood.

"No, no!" he murmured, "I can save it, and myself too."

He began to swim; but he had neither the skill nor the practice of Jean Oullier in that exercise. Moreover, the weight of the gold upon him was too great; at every stroke he went beneath the water, which, in spite of him, got into his throat. Again he called to Jean, but Jean Oullier was now a hundred yards away.

In one of these immersions, which lasted longer than the others, he was seized with a sort of vertigo, and suddenly, with a rapid movement, he detached the belt. But, before letting his precious gold drop into the gulf, he resolved to handle it, to feel it for the last time; he did clasp it, he did feel it with his trembling fingers.

That last contact with the metal he loved decided his fate; he could not resolve to release his hold of it; he pressed it to his breast, and made a strong movement with his feet to tread the water; but the weight of the upper part of his body burdened with the coin threw him off his balance; he sank. After a few seconds passed under water, he rose half suffocated, flung a curse to the heaven he saw for the last time, and then, dragged down by his gold as by a demon, he went to the bottom.

Jean Oullier, turning at that moment, saw rings upon the surface of the water,--the last sign given by the mayor of La Logerie of his existence; the last movement ever made around him in the land of the living.

The Vendéan raised his eyes to heaven and worshipped God for the justice of his

decrees.

Jean Oullier swam well; but his recent wound and the fatigues and emotions of this terrible night had exhausted him. When he was only a hundred strokes from the shore he felt that his strength betrayed his courage; nevertheless, calm and resolute in this crucial moment as he had been all his life, he resolved to struggle to the last. On he swam.

Soon he felt a sort of faintness; his limbs grew numb; he fancied a thousand pins were pricking and tearing his flesh; his muscles grew painful; the blood mounted violently to his brain, and a dull, confused humming, like the roaring of the sea against the rocks, clamored in his ears; black clouds filled with phosphorescent sparks danced before his eyes; he thought he was about to die, and yet his limbs, obedient in their impotence, continued the motion his will imposed upon them. He still swam.

His eyes closed in spite of himself; his limbs now stiffened entirely; he gave a last thought to those with whom he had crossed the sea of life,--to the children, to the wife, to the old man who had brightened his youth; to the two young girls who had taken the places of those he loved; he desired that his last prayer, like his last thought, should be of them.

But at that instant, and in spite of himself, an idea suddenly crossed his brain. A phantom passed before his eyes; he saw the elder Michel bathed in his blood, dying on the mossy ground of the forest. Raising his arm from the water aloft to heaven he cried out:--

"God! if I was mistaken, if it was a crime, forgive me! not in this world but the next!"

Then, as if that solemn invocation had exhausted its last powers, the soul seemed to leave the body, which floated inert upon the current at the moment when the sun, rising above the mountains on the horizon, gilded with its earliest fires the waters of

the lake,--the same moment when Courtin, sinking to the bottom, rendered his last breath; the same moment when Petit-Pierre, in Nantes, was driven from her hiding-place and arrested.

Michel, in charge of the soldiers, was making his way to Nantes.

After marching half an hour along the high-road, the lieutenant who commanded the little troop came up to his prisoner.

"Monsieur," he said, "you look like a gentleman; I have the honor to be one myself. It pains me to see you handcuffed. Will you give me your word of honor not to escape if I release you?"

"Gladly," said Michel; "and I thank you, monsieur, swearing to you that no matter from what direction succor may come to me, I will not leave your side without your permission."

After this they continued their way, arm in arm; so that any one who met them would little have suspected that one was a prisoner.

The night was fine, the sunrise splendid; all the flowers, moist with dew, sparkled like diamonds; the air was full of sweetest fragrance; the birds were singing in the branches. This march to Nantes was really a delightful promenade.

When they reached the extremity of the lake of Grand-Lieu the lieutenant stopped his prisoner, with whom he had advanced fully half a mile beyond the escort, and pointing to a black mass, which was floating on the surface of the water, about fifty feet from the shore, he asked him what he thought it was.

"It looks like the body of a man," answered Michel.

"Can you swim?"

"A little."

"Ah, if I knew how to swim I'd be in the water now," said the officer, sighing, and turning as if to call up his men.

Michel waited for nothing more; he ran to the bank, threw off his clothes, and jumped into the lake. A few instants later he brought to shore a body he had already recognized as that of Jean Oullier.

During this time the soldiers had come up, and they at once set to work to revive the drowning man. One of them took out his flask, and prying open the Vendéan's teeth poured a few drops of brandy into his mouth.

This revived him. His first glance fell on Michel, who was holding his head, and such an expression of anguish came upon his face that the lieutenant noticed and mistook it.

"This is the man who saved you, my friend," he said, pointing to Michel.

"Saved me! he! his son!" exclaimed Jean Oullier. "Ah! I thank thee, God, who art wonderful in thy mercy as thou art terrible in thy justice!"

EPILOGUE.

Toward seven o'clock in the evening of a day in the year 1842, ten years after the events we have here recorded, a heavy carriage stopped before the gate of the Carmelite convent at Chartres.

The carriage contained five persons: two children eight and nine years old, a gentleman and lady,--the first about thirty-five, the second thirty,--and a peasant, bent with age but still vigorous in spite of his white hair. Although his dress was humble, this peasant occupied the seat beside the lady; one of the children was sitting on his knee and playing with the rings of a thick steel chain which fastened his watch to the button-hole of his waistcoat, while he himself passed his brown and shrivelled hand through the silky hair of the little one.

At the jar of the carriage, as it turned from the paved high-road into the faubourg Saint-Jean, the lady put her head out of the window; then she drew it back with an expression of pain as she saw the high walls that surrounded the convent, and the

gloomy portal which gave entrance to it.

The postilion dismounted, and going, to the door of the carriage said:--

"This is the place."

The lady pressed the hand of her husband, who was seated opposite to her, while two large tears rolled down her cheeks.

"Go, Mary, and take courage," said the young man, in whom our readers will recognize Baron Michel de la Logerie. "I regret that the convent rules will not let me share this duty with you. It is the first time in ten years we have suffered apart."

"You will speak to her of me, will you not?" said the old peasant.

"Yes, my Jean," answered Mary.

The young woman sprang from the carriage and knocked at the gate. The sound of the knocker gave a funeral note, which echoed through the vaulted portal.

"Mère Sainte-Marthe?" said the lady when her summons was answered.

"Are you the person our mother is expecting?" asked the Carmelite.

"Yes, sister."

"Then come in. You shall see her; but remember, our rule requires that, although she is our Superior, you can see her only in presence of a sister; and she forbids you absolutely to speak to her, even in these last moments, of the earthly things she has left behind her."

Mary bowed her head.

The Carmelite went first and conducted the Baronne de la Logerie along a damp, dark corridor, in which were a dozen doors; she opened one of these doors and stood aside to allow the lady to enter. Mary hesitated an instant; she was choking with emotion; then she regained her self-command, crossed the threshold, and found herself in a little cell about eight feet square.

In this cell, for all furniture, was a bed, a chair, and a prie-dieu; for all ornament, a

few holy images fastened to the bare walls, and an ebony and brass crucifix, which stretched out its arms above the prie-dieu.

Mary saw nothing of all that. On the bed lay a woman whose face had taken the color and the transparency of wax, and whose discolored lips seemed about to exhale their parting breath.

This woman was, or rather, had been Bertha. She was now naught else than the Mère Sainte-Marthe, superior of the convent of the Carmelites at Chartres,--soon to be only a corpse.

When she saw the lady enter the dying woman stretched forth her arms, and Mary fled to them. Long they held themselves embraced; Mary bathing with tears her sister's face, Bertha gasping,--for in her eyes, hollowed by the austerities of the cloister, there seemed to be no more tears.

The Carmelite sister, who had seated herself on the chair and was reading her breviary, was, however, not so occupied with her prayers that she did not notice what was passing before her. She probably thought these embraces were lasting too long, for she coughed significantly.

Mère Sainte-Marthe gently pushed Mary away from her, but did not release her hand, which she held in hers.

"Sister! sister!" murmured Mary, "who could have told me we should meet thus?"

"It is God's will, to which we must submit," replied the Carmelite mother.

"His will is sometimes very stern," sighed Mary.

"How can you say so, sister? That will is gentle and most merciful to me. God, who might have left me longer on this earth, deigns to recall me to Him."

"You will meet our father above," said Mary.

"And whom do I leave behind me?"

"Our good Jean Oullier, who lives and loves you always, Bertha."

"Thank you; and whom else?"

"My husband,--and two children, who are named, the boy, Pierre, the girl, Bertha. I have taught them to bless you daily."

A faint color came upon the cheeks of the dying woman.

"Dear children!" she murmured, "if God grants me a place beside Him, I promise to pray for them above."

And the dying soul began on earth the prayer it was to end in heaven.

In the midst of that prayer and in the silence of that cell, the striking of a clock was heard, then the tinkling of a bell, and the sound of feet approaching along the corridor. They were bringing the viaticum.

Mary fell on her knees by Bertha's pillow. The priest entered, holding the sacred chalice in his left hand, and in his right the consecrated wafer.

At this moment Mary felt the hand of Bertha seeking hers; for the purpose, as she thought, of pressing it. She was mistaken; Bertha slipped into her sister's hand an object which she felt to be a locket. She tried to look at it.

"No no," said Bertha, "wait till I am dead."

Mary made a sign of obedience and bowed her head upon her clasped hands.

The cell was now filled with nuns, all kneeling; and as far as could be seen along the corridor were others in their gloomy robes kneeling and praying.

The dying woman seemed to recover some strength with which to go into the presence of her Creator; she lifted herself up, murmuring:--

"I am ready, my God!"

The priest laid the wafer on her lips, and she fell back gently on the bed with closed eyes and clasped hands. Except for the motion of her lips, she seemed to have died, so pale was her face, so feeble the breath that issued from her bosom.

The priest concluded the other ceremonies of the extreme unction, but she did not

open her eyes. He left the cell, and the assistants followed him.

The Carmelite nun, who had first met Mary, now came to her where she knelt, and touching her gently on the shoulder, said:--

"My sister, the rule of our order forbids that you should stay any longer in this cell."

"Bertha! Bertha!" said Mary, sobbing, "do you hear what they say to me? My God! after living together twenty years without being parted for a single day, and then separated for eleven years,--not to be allowed one hour together when we are parting for eternity!"

"You may stay in the house until I am dead, my sister and it will make me happy to think you are near me and praying for me."

Mary bent down to kiss her dying sister for the last time, but the nun interposed, saying:--

"Do not turn our blessed mother's mind from the celestial path she now has entered, by vain, earthly thoughts."

"Oh, I will not leave her thus!" cried Mary, flinging herself on Bertha's bed and putting her lips to those of her sister. Bertha's lips replied by a feeble quiver, then she gently pushed her sister away from her. But the hand that made this motion had no power to rejoin the other, and it fell inert upon the bed.

The nun advanced, and without a tear, without a sigh, without a sign of emotion upon her face, she took that dying hand, joined it to the other, and laid them clasped upon Bertha's breast. Then she gently pushed Mary to the door.

"Oh, Bertha! Bertha!" cried her sister, breaking into sobs.

It seemed to her that a murmur echoed back these sobs, and in that murmur she fancied that she heard the name of "Mary!"

She was in the corridor; the door of the cell was closed behind her.

"Oh, let me see her!" she cried. "Let me see her once more,--only once!"

But the nun stretched out her arms and barred the way.

"I submit," said Mary, blinded by her tears. "Take me where you choose, sister."

The nun led her to an empty cell, the occupant of which had died the night before. Mary saw through her tears a prie-dieu surmounted by a crucifix, and she went, half stumbling, to kneel there.

For an hour she remained absorbed in prayer. At the end of an hour the nun returned and said, in the same cold impassible voice:--

"Mère Sainte-Marthe is dead."

"May I see her?" asked Mary.

"The rule of our order forbids it," replied the Carmelite.

Mary dropped her head into her hands with a sigh. One of those hands still clasped the object Bertha had given her at the moment she was about to receive, for the last time, the blessed sacrament. Mère Sainte-Marthe was dead, and Mary was free to look at what she had given her.

It was, as she knew already from its shape, a locket. Mary opened it. It contained some hair and a paper. The hair was the color of Michel's hair; the paper contained these words: "Cut during his sleep on the night of June 5, 1832."

"O, my God!" murmured Mary, raising her eyes to the crucifix, "my God! in thy mercy receive her! for thy passion lasted but forty days, and hers has lasted eleven years!"

Putting the locket upon her heart, Mary went down the cold, damp stairway of the convent.

The carriage and those it contained were still waiting before the gate.

"Well?" asked Michel, opening the door and making a step toward his wife.

"Alas, it is all over!" replied Mary, throwing herself into his arms. "She died promising to pray for us above."

"Happy children!" said Jean Oullier, laying his hands, one on the head of the little boy, the other on that of the little girl. "Happy children! walk fearlessly through life, for a martyr watches over you in heaven!"

FOOTNOTES

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

Footnote 2: I refer those of my readers who would like to have a key to the real names of these men to the careful and interesting book of General Dermoncourt entitled "La Vendée and Madame."

Footnote 3:Hers was a gallant soul. She was privately married to an Italian nobleman of distinguished name and fame, and a child was born to her during her imprisonment at Blaye. The Bourbons never forgave her; they treated her, and so did the French people, as if she had disgraced herself. Justice has never been done to her brave, generous, gallant heart,--a royal heart that felt for others. Her second marriage was a most happy one. She survived her husband several years, and died in 1873.--Tr.

THE END.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE LAST VENDÉE; OR, THE SHE-WOLVES OF MACHECOUL ***

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