THE CONAN DOYLE HISTORICAL ROMANCES

A Conan Doyle

THE
CONAN DOYLE
HISTORICAL ROMANCES

VOLUME TWO

RODNEY STONE
UNCLE BERNAC
EXPLOITS OF BRIGADIER GERARD
ADVENTURES OF GERARD

By SIR ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE

LONDON
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET, W

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RODNEY STONE

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and yet those children can now reach the plums in the garden whilst we are seeking for a ladder, and where we once walked with their little hands in ours, we are glad now to lean upon their arms. But I shall speak of a time when the love of a mother was the only love I knew, and if you seek for something more, then it is not for you that I write. But if you would come out with me into that forgotten world; if you would know Boy Jim and Champion Harrison; if you would meet my father, one of Nelson's own men; if you would catch a glimpse of that great seaman himself, and of George, afterwards the unworthy King of England; if, above all, you would see my famous uncle, Sir Charles Tregellis, the King of the Bucks, and the great fighting men whose names are still household words amongst you, then give me your hand, and let us start.

But I must warn you also that, if you think you will find much that is of interest in your guide, you are destined to disappointment. When I look over my book-shelves, I can see that it is only the wise and witty and valiant who have ventured to write down their experiences. For my own part, if I were only assured that I was as clever and brave as the average man about me, I should be well satisfied. Men of their hands have thought well of my brains, and men of brains of my hands, and that is the best that I can say of myself. Save in the one matter of having an inborn readiness for music, so that the mastery of any instrument comes very easily and naturally to me, I cannot recall any single advantage which I can boast over my fellows. In all things I have been a half-way man, for I am of middle height, my eyes are neither blue nor grey, and my hair, before Nature dusted it with her powder, was betwixt flaxen and brown. I may, perhaps, claim this: that through life I have never felt a touch of jealousy as I have admired a better man than myself, and that I have always seen all things as they are, myself included, which should count in my favour now that I sit down in my mature age to write my

memories. With your permission, then, we will push my own personality as far as possible out of the picture. If you can conceive me as a thin and colourless cord upon which my would-be pearls are strung, you will be accepting me upon the terms which I should wish.

Our family, the Stones, have for many generations belonged to the Navy, and it has been a custom among us for the eldest son to take the name of his father's favourite commander. Thus we can trace our lineage back to old Vernon Stone, who commanded a high-sterned, peak-nosed, fifty-gun ship against the Dutch. Through Hawke Stone and Benbow Stone we came down to my father, Anson Stone, who in his turn christened me Rodney, at the parish church of St. Thomas at Portsmouth in the year of grace 1786.

Out of my window as I write I can see my own great lad in the garden, and if I were to call out "Nelson!" you would see that I have been true to the traditions of our family.

My dear mother, the best that ever a man had, was the second daughter of the Reverend John Tregellis, Vicar of Milton, which is a small parish upon the borders of the marshes of Langstone. She came of a poor family, but one of some position, for her elder brother was the famous Sir Charles Tregellis, who, having inherited the money of a wealthy East Indian merchant, became in time the talk of the town and the very particular friend of the Prince of Wales. Of him I shall have more to say hereafter; but you will note now that he was my own uncle, and brother to my mother.

I can remember her all through her beautiful life, for she was but a girl when she married, and little more when I can first recall her busy fingers and her gentle voice. I see her as a lively woman with kind, dove's eyes, somewhat short of stature it is true, but carrying herself very bravely. In my memories of those days she is clad always in some purple shimmering stuff, with a white kerchief round her long white neck, and I see her fingers

turning and darting as she works at her knitting. I see her again in her middle years, sweet and loving, planning, contriving, achieving, with the few shillings a day of a lieutenant's pay on which to support the cottage at Friar's Oak, and to keep a fair face to the world. And now, if I do but step into the parlour, I can see her once more, with over eighty years of saintly life behind her, silver-haired, placid-faced, with her dainty ribboned cap, her gold-rimmed glasses, and her woolly shawl with the blue border. I loved her young and I love her old, and when she goes she will take something with her which nothing in the world can ever make good to me again. You may have many friends, you who read this, and you may chance to marry more than once, but your mother is your first and your last. Cherish her, then, whilst you may, for the day will come when every hasty deed or heedless word will come back with its sting to hive in your own heart.

Such, then, was my mother; and as to my father, I can describe him best when I come to the time when he returned to us from the Mediterranean. During all my childhood he was only a name to me, and a face in a miniature hung round my mother's neck. At first they told me he was fighting the French, and then after some years one heard less about the French and more about General Buonaparte. I remember the awe with which one day in Thomas Street, Portsmouth, I saw a print of the great Corsican in a bookseller's window. This, then, was the arch enemy with whom my father spent his life in terrible and ceaseless contest. To my childish imagination it was a personal affair, and I for ever saw my father and this clean-shaven, thin-lipped man swaying and reeling in a deadly, year-long grapple. It was not until I went to the Grammar School that I understood how many other little boys there were whose fathers were in the same case.

Only once in those long years did my father return home, which will show you what it meant to be the wife

of a sailor in those days. It was just after we had moved from Portsmouth to Friar's Oak, whither he came for a week before he set sail with Admiral Jervis to help him to turn his name into Lord St. Vincent. I remember that he frightened as well as fascinated me with his talk of battles, and I can recall as if it were yesterday the horror with which I gazed upon a spot of blood upon his shirt ruffle, which had come, as I have no doubt, from a mischance in shaving. At the time I never questioned that it had spurted from some stricken Frenchman or Spaniard, and I shrank from him in terror when he laid his horny hand upon my head. My mother wept bitterly when he was gone, but for my own part I was not sorry to see his blue back and white shorts going down the garden walk, for I felt, with the heedless selfishness of a child, that we were closer together, she and I, when we were alone.

I was in my eleventh year when we moved from Portsmouth to Friar's Oak, a little Sussex village to the north of Brighton, which was recommended to us by my uncle, Sir Charles Tregellis, one of whose grand friends, Lord Avon, had had his seat near there. The reason of our moving was that living was cheaper in the country, and that it was easier for my mother to keep up the appearance of a gentlewoman when away from the circle of those to whom she could not refuse hospitality. They were trying times those to all save the farmers, who made such profits that they could, as I have heard, afford to let half their land lie fallow, while living like gentlemen upon the rest. Wheat was at a hundred and ten shillings a quarter, and the quartern loaf at one and ninepence. Even in the quiet of the cottage of Friar's Oak we could scarce have lived, were it not that in the blockading squadron in which my father was stationed there was the occasional chance of a little prize-money. The line-of-battle ships themselves, tacking on and off outside Brest, could earn nothing save honour; but the frigates in attendance made prizes of many coasters, and these, as

is the rule of the service, were counted as belonging to the fleet, and their produce divided into head-money. In this manner my father was able to send home enough to keep the cottage and to pay for me at the day school of Mr. Joshua Allen, where for four years I learned all that he had to teach. It was at Allen's school that I first knew Jim Harrison, Boy Jim as he has always been called, the nephew of Champion Harrison of the village smithy. I can see him as he was in those days with great, floundering, half-formed limbs like a Newfoundland puppy, and a face that set every woman's head round as he passed her. It was in those days that we began our lifelong friendship, a friendship which still in our waning years binds us closely as two brothers. I taught him his exercises, for he never loved the sight of a book, and he in turn made me box and wrestle, tickle trout on the Adur, and snare rabbits on Ditchling Down, for his hands were as active as his brain was slow. He was two years my elder, however, so that, long before I had finished my schooling, he had gone to help his uncle at the smithy.

Friar's Oak is in a dip of the Downs, and the forty-third milestone between London and Brighton lies on the skirt of the village. It is but a small place, with an ivied church, a fine vicarage and a row of red-brick cottages each in its own little garden. At one end was the forge of Champion Harrison, with his house behind it, and at the other was Mr. Allen's school. The yellow cottage, standing back a little from the road, with its upper story bulging forward and a crisscross of black woodwork let into the plaster, is the one in which we lived. I do not know if it is still standing, but I should think it likely, for it was not a place much given to change.

Just opposite to us, at the other side of the broad, white road, was the Friar's Oak Inn, which was kept in my day by John Cummings, a man of excellent repute at home, but liable to strange outbreaks when he travelled, as will afterwards become apparent. Though there was a stream of traffic upon the road, the coaches from Brighton

were too fresh to stop, and those from London too eager to reach their journey's end, so that if it had not been for an occasional broken trace or loosened wheel, the landlord would have had only the thirsty throats of the village to trust to. Those were the days when the Prince of Wales had just built his singular palace by the sea, and so from May to September, which was the Brighton season, there was never a day that from one to two hundred curricles, chaises and phaetons did not rattle past our doors. Many a summer evening have Boy Jim and I lain upon the grass, watching all these grand folk, and cheering the London coaches as they came roaring through the dust clouds, leaders and wheelers stretched to their work, the bugles screaming and the coachmen with their low-crowned, curly-brimmed hats, and their faces as scarlet as their coats. The passengers used to laugh when Boy Jim shouted at them, but if they could have read his big half-set limbs and his loose shoulders aright, they would have looked a little harder at him, perhaps, and given him back his cheer.

Boy Jim had never known a father or a mother, and his whole life had been spent with his uncle, Champion Harrison. Harrison was the Friar's Oak blacksmith, and he had his nickname because he fought Tom Johnson when he held the English belt, and would most certainly have beaten him had the Bedfordshire magistrates not appeared to break up the fight. For years there was no such glutton to take punishment and no more finishing hitter than Harrison, though he was always, as I understand, a slow one upon his feet. At last, in a fight with Black Baruk the Jew, he finished the battle with such a lashing hit that he not only knocked his opponent over the inner ropes, but he left him betwixt life and death for long three weeks. During all this time Harrison lived half demented, expecting every hour to feel the hand of a Bow Street runner upon his collar, and to be tried for his life. This experience, with the prayers of his wife, made him forswear the Ring for evèr, and carry

his great muscles into the one trade in which they seemed to give him an advantage. There was a good business to be done at Friar's Oak from the passing traffic and the Sussex farmers, so that he soon became the richest of the villagers; and he came to church on a Sunday with his wife and his nephew, looking as respectable a family man as one would wish to see.

He was not a tall man, not more than five feet seven inches, and it was often said that if he had had an extra inch of reach he would have been a match for Jackson or Belcher at their best. His chest was like a barrel, and his forearms were the most powerful that I have ever seen, with deep grooves between the smooth-swelling muscles like a piece of water-worn rock. In spite of his strength, however, he was of a slow, orderly and kindly disposition, so that there was no man more beloved over the whole country-side. His heavy, placid, clean-shaven face could set very sternly, as I have seen upon occasion; but for me and every child in the village there was ever a smile upon his lips and a greeting in his eyes. There was not a beggar upon the country-side who did not know that his heart was as soft as his muscles were hard.

There was nothing that he liked to talk of more than his old battles, but he would stop if he saw his little wife coming, for the one great shadow in her life was the ever-present fear that some day he would throw down sledge and rasp and be off to the Ring once more. And you must be reminded here once for all that that former calling of his was by no means at that time in the debased condition to which it afterwards fell. Public opinion has gradually become opposed to it, for the reason that it came largely into the hands of rogues, and because it fostered ringside ruffianism. Even the honest and brave pugilist was found to draw villainy round him, just as the pure and noble racehorse does. For this reason the Ring is dying in England, and we may hope that when Caunt and Bendigo have passed away, they may have none to succeed them. But it was different in the days of which

I speak. Public opinion was then largely in its favour, and there were good reasons why it should be so. It was a time of war, when England, with an army and navy composed only of those who volunteered to fight because they had fighting blood in them, had to encounter, as they would now have to encounter, a power which could by despotic law turn every citizen into a soldier. If the people had not been full of this lust for combat, it is certain that England must have been overborne. And it was thought, and is, on the face of it, reasonable, that a struggle between two indomitable men, with thirty thousand to view it and three million to discuss it, did help to set a standard of hardihood and endurance. Brutal it was, no doubt, and its brutality is the end of it; but it is not so brutal as war, which will survive it. Whether it is logical now to teach the people to be peaceful in an age when their very existence may come to depend upon their being warlike, is a question for wiser heads than mine. But that was what we thought of it in the days of your grandfathers, and that is why you might find statesmen and philanthropists like Windham, Fox and Althorp at the side of the Ring.

The mere fact that solid men should patronise it was enough in itself to prevent the villainy which afterwards crept in. For over twenty years, in the days of Jackson, Brain, Cribb, the Belchers, Pearce, Gully and the rest, the leaders of the Ring were men whose honesty was above suspicion; and those were just the twenty years when the Ring may, as I have said, have served a national purpose. You have heard how Pearce saved the Bristol girl from the burning house, how Jackson won the respect and friendship of the best men of his age, and how Gully rose to a seat in the first Reformed Parliament. These were the men who set the standard, and their trade carried with it this obvious recommendation, that it is one in which no drunken or foul-living man could long succeed. There were exceptions among them, no doubt —bullies like Hickman and brutes like Berks; in the

main, I say again that they were honest men, brave and enduring to an incredible degree, and a credit to the country which produced them. It was, as you will see, my fate to see something of them, and I speak of what I know.

In our own village, I can assure you that we were very proud of the presence of such a man as Champion Harrison, and if folks stayed at the inn they would walk down as far as the smithy just to have the sight of him. And he was worth seeing, too, especially on a winter's night when the red glare of the forge would beat upon his great muscles and upon the proud, hawk-face of Boy Jim as they heaved and swayed over some glowing plough coulter, framing themselves in sparks with every blow. He would strike once with his thirty-pound swing sledge, and Jim twice with his hand hammer; and the "Clunk —clink, clink! clunk—clink, clink!" would bring me flying down the village street, on the chance that, since they were both at the anvil, there might be a place for me at the bellows.

Only once during those village years can I remember Champion Harrison showing me for an instant the sort of man that he had been. It chanced one summer morning, when Boy Jim and I were standing by the smithy door, that there came a private coach from Brighton, with its four fresh horses, and its brass-work shining, flying along with such a merry rattle and jingling, that the Champion came running out with a half-fullered shoe in his tongs to have a look at it. A gentleman in a white coachman's cape—a Corinthian, as we would call him in those days—was driving, and half a dozen of his fellows, laughing and shouting, were on the top behind him. It may have been that the bulk of the smith caught his eye, and that he acted in pure wantonness, or it may possibly have been an accident, but, as he swung past, the twenty-foot thong of the driver's whip hissed round and we heard the sharp snap of it across Harrison's leather apron.

"Halloa, master!" shouted the smith, looking after him. "You're not to be trusted on the box until you can handle your whip better'n that."

"What's that?" cried the driver, pulling up his team.

"I bid you have a care, master, or there will be some one-eyed folk along the road you drive."

"Oh, you say that, do you?" said the driver, putting his whip into its socket and pulling off his driving-gloves. "I'll have a little talk with you, my fine fellow."

The sporting gentlemen of those days were very fine boxers for the most part, for it was the mode to take a course of Mendoza, just as a few years afterwards there was no man about town who had not had the mufflers on with Jackson. Knowing their own prowess, they never refused the chance of a wayside adventure, and it was seldom indeed that the bargee or the navigator had much to boast of after a young blood had taken off his coat to him.

This one swung himself off the box-seat with the alacrity of a man who has no doubts about the upshot of the quarrel, and after hanging his caped coat upon the swingle-bar, he daintily turned up the ruffled cuffs of his white cambric shirt.

"I'll pay you for your advice, my man," said he.

I am sure that the men upon the coach knew who the burly smith was, and looked upon it as a prime joke to see their companion walk into such a trap. They roared with delight, and bellowed out scraps of advice to him.

"Knock some of the soot off him, Lord Frederick!" they shouted. "Give the Johnny Raw his breakfast. Chuck him in among his own cinders! Sharp's the word, or you'll see the back of him."

Encouraged by these cries, the young aristocrat advanced upon his man. The smith never moved, but his mouth set grim and hard, while his tufted brows came down over his keen, grey eyes. The tongs had fallen, and his hands were hanging free.

"Have a care, master," said he. "You'll get pepper if you don't."

Something in the assured voice, and something also in the quiet pose, warned the young lord of his danger. I saw him look hard at his antagonist, and as he did so, his hands and his jaw dropped together.

"By Gad!" he cried, "it's Jack Harrison!"

"My name, master!"

"And I thought you were some Essex chaw-bacon! Why, man, I haven't seen you since the day you nearly killed Black Baruk, and cost me a cool hundred by doing it."

How they roared on the coach.

"Smoked! Smoked, by Gad!" they yelled. "It's Jack Harrison the bruiser! Lord Frederick was going to take on the ex-champion. Give him one on the apron, Fred, and see what happens."

But the driver had already climbed back into his perch, laughing as loudly as any of his companions.

"We'll let you off this time, Harrison," said he. "Are those your sons down there?"

"This is my nephew, master."

"Here's a guinea for him! He shall never say I robbed him of his uncle." And so, having turned the laugh in his favour by his merry way of taking it, he cracked his whip, and away they flew to make London under the five hours; while Jack Harrison, with his half-fullered shoe in his hand, went whistling back to the forge.

2. *The Walker of Cliffe Royal*

SO much for Champion Harrison! Now, I wish to say something more about Boy Jim, not only because he was the comrade of my youth, but because you will find as you go on that this book is his story rather than mine, and that there came a time when his name and his fame were in the mouths of all England. You will

bear with me, therefore, while I tell you of his character as it was in those days, and especially of one very singular adventure which neither of us is likely to forget.

It was strange to see Jim with his uncle and his aunt, for he seemed to be of another race and breed to them. Often I have watched them come up the aisle upon a Sunday, first the square, thick-set man, and then the little, worn, anxious-eyed woman, and last this glorious lad with his clear-cut face, his black curls and his step so springy and light that it seemed as if he were bound to earth by some lesser tie than the heavy-footed villagers round him. He had not yet attained his full six foot of stature, but no judge of a man (and every woman, at least, is one) could look at his perfect shoulders, his narrow loins, and his proud head that sat upon his neck like an eagle upon its perch, without feeling that sober joy which all that is beautiful in Nature gives to us—a vague self-content, as though in some way we also had a hand in the making of it.

But we are used to associate beauty with softness in a man. I do not know why they should be so coupled, and they never were with Jim. Of all men that I have known, he was the most iron-hard in body and in mind. Who was there among us who could walk with him, or run with him, or swim with him? Who on all the country-side, save only Boy Jim, would have swung himself over Wolstonbury Cliff, and clambered down a hundred feet with the mother hawk flapping at his ears in the vain struggle to hold him from her nest? He was but sixteen, with his gristle not yet all set into bone, when he fought and beat Gipsy Lee, of Burgess Hill, who called himself the "Cock of the South Downs." It was after this that Champion Harrison took his training as a boxer in hand.

"I'd rather you left millin' alone, Boy Jim," said he, "and so had the missus; but if mill you must, it will not be my fault if you cannot hold up your hands to anything in the south country."

And it was not long before he made good his promise.

I have said already that Boy Jim had no love for his books, but by that I meant school-books, for when it came to the reading of romances or of anything which had a touch of gallantry or adventure, there was no tearing him away from it until it was finished. When such a book came into his hands, Friar's Oak and the smithy became a dream to him, and his life was spent out upon the ocean or wandering over the broad continents with his heroes. And he would draw me into his enthusiasms also, so that I was glad to play Friday to his Crusoe when he proclaimed that the Clump at Clayton was a desert island, and that we were cast upon it for a week. But when I found that we were actually to sleep out there without covering every night, and that he proposed that our food should be the sheep of the Downs (wild goats he called them) cooked upon a fire, which was to be made by the rubbing together of two sticks, my heart failed me, and on the very first night I crept away to my mother. But Jim stayed out there for the whole weary week—a wet week it was, too !—and came back at the end of it looking a deal wilder and dirtier than his hero does in the picture-books. It is well that he had only promised to stay a week, for, if it had been a month, he would have died of cold and hunger before his pride would have let him come home.

His pride !—that was the deepest thing in all Jim's nature. It is a mixed quality to my mind, half a virtue and half a vice : a virtue in holding a man out of the dirt ; a vice in making it hard for him to rise when once he has fallen. Jim was proud down to the very marrow of his bones. You remember the guinea that the young lord had thrown him from the box of the coach ? Two days later somebody picked it from the roadside mud. Jim only had seen where it had fallen, and he would not deign even to point it out to a beggar. Nor would he stoop to give a reason in such a case, but would answer all remonstrances with a curl of his lip and a flash of his dark eyes. Even at school he was the same, with such

a sense of his own dignity, that other folk had to think of it too. He might say, as he did say, that a right angle was a proper sort of angle, or put Panama in Sicily, but old Joshua Allen would as soon have thought of raising his cane against him as he would of letting me off if I had said as much. And so it was that, although Jim was the son of nobody, and I of a King's officer, it always seemed to me to have been a condescension on his part that he should have chosen me as his friend.

It was this pride of Boy Jim's which led to an adventure which makes me shiver now when I think of it.

It happened in the August of '99, or it may have been in the early days of September; but I remember that we heard the cuckoo in Patcham Wood, and that Jim said that perhaps it was the last of him. I was still at school, but Jim had left, he being nigh sixteen and I thirteen. It was my Saturday half-holiday, and we spent it, as we often did, out upon the Downs. Our favourite place was beyond Wolstonbury, where we could stretch ourselves upon the soft, springy, chalk grass among the plump little Southdown sheep, chatting with the shepherds, as they leaned upon their queer old Pyecombe crooks, made in the days when Sussex turned out more iron than all the counties of England.

It was there that we lay upon that glorious afternoon. If we chose to roll upon our right sides, the whole weald lay in front of us, with the North Downs curving away in olive-green folds, with here and there the snow-white rift of a chalk-pit; if we turned upon our left, we overlooked the huge blue stretch of the Channel. A convoy, as I can well remember, was coming up it that day, the timid flock of merchantmen in front; the frigates, like well-trained dogs, upon the skirts; and two burly drover line-of-battle ships rolling along behind them. My fancy was soaring out to my father upon the waters, when a word from Jim brought it back on to the grass like a broken-winged gull.

" Roddy," said he, " have you heard that Cliffe Royal is haunted ? "

Had I heard it ? Of course I had heard it. Who was there in all the Down country who had not heard of the Walker of Cliffe Royal ?

" Do you know the story of it, Roddy ? "

" Why," said I, with some pride, " I ought to know it, seeing that my mother's brother, Sir Charles Tregellis, was the nearest friend of Lord Avon, and was at this card-party when the thing happened. I heard the vicar and my mother talking about it last week, and it was all so clear to me that I might have been there when the murder was done."

" It is a strange story," said Jim, thoughtfully ; " but when I asked my aunt about it, she would give me no answer ; and as to my uncle, he cut me short at the very mention of it."

" There is a good reason for that," said I ; " for Lord Avon was, as I have heard, your uncle's best friend ; and it is but natural that he would not wish to speak of his disgrace."

" Tell me the story, Roddy."

" It is an old one now—fourteen years old—and yet they have not got to the end of it. There were four of them who had come down from London to spend a few days in Lord Avon's old house. One was his own young brother, Captain Barrington ; another was his cousin, Sir Lothian Hume ; Sir Charles Tregellis, my uncle, was the third ; and Lord Avon the fourth. They are fond of playing cards for money, these great people, and they played and played for two days and a night. Lord Avon lost, and Sir Lothian lost, and my uncle lost, and Captain Barrington won until he could win no more. He won their money, but above all he won papers from his elder brother which meant a great deal to him. It was late on a Monday night that they stopped playing. On the Tuesday morning Captain Barrington was found dead beside his bed with his throat cut."

"And Lord Avon did it?"

"His papers were found burned in the grate, his wrist-band was clutched in the dead man's hand, and his knife lay beside the body."

"Did they hang him, then?"

"They were too slow in laying hands upon him. He waited until he saw that they had brought it home to him, and then he fled. He has never been seen since, but it is said that he reached America."

"And the ghost walks?"

"There are many who have seen it."

"Why is the house still empty?"

"Because it is in the keeping of the law. Lord Avon had no children, and Sir Lothian Hume—the same who was at the card-party—is his nephew and heir. But he can touch nothing until he can prove Lord Avon to be dead."

Jim lay silent for a bit, plucking at the short grass with his fingers.

"Roddy," said he at last, "will you come with me to-night and look for the ghost?"

It turned me cold, the very thought of it.

"My mother would not let me."

"Slip out when she's abed. I'll wait for you at the smithy."

"Cliffe Royal is locked."

"I'll open a window easy enough."

"I'm afraid, Jim."

"But you are not afraid if you are with me, Roddy I'll promise you that no ghost shall hurt you."

So I gave him my word that I would come, and then all the rest of the day I went about the most sad-faced lad in Sussex. It was all very well for Boy Jim! It was that pride of his which was taking him there. He would go because there was no one else on the country-side that would dare. But I had no pride of that sort. I was quite of the same way of thinking as the others, and would as soon have thought of passing my night at Jacob's gibbet

on Ditchling Common as in the haunted house of Cliffe Royal. Still, I could not bring myself to desert Jim; and so, as I say, I slunk about the house with so pale and peaky a face that my dear mother would have it that I had been at the green apples, and sent me to bed early with a dish of camomile tea for my supper.

England went to rest betimes in those days, for there were few who could afford the price of candles. When I looked out of my window just after the clock had gone ten, there was not a light in the village save only at the inn. It was but a few feet from the ground, so I slipped out, and there was Jim waiting for me at the smithy corner. We crossed John's Common together, and so past Ridden's Farm, meeting only one or two riding officers upon the way. There was a brisk wind blowing, and the moon kept peeping through the rifts of the scud, so that our road was sometimes silver-clear, and sometimes so black that we found ourselves among the brambles and gorse-bushes which lined it. We came at last to the wooden gate with the high stone pillars by the roadside, and, looking through between the rails, we saw the long avenue of oaks, and at the end of this ill-boding tunnel, the pale face of the house glimmered in the moonshine.

That would have been enough for me, that one glimpse of it, and the sound of the night wind sighing and groaning among the branches. But Jim swung the gate open, and up we went, the gravel squeaking beneath our tread. It towered high, the old house, with many little windows in which the moon glinted, and with a strip of water running round three sides of it. The arched door stood right in the face of us, and on one side a lattice hung open upon its hinges.

"We're in luck, Roddy," whispered Jim. "Here's one of the windows open."

"Don't you think we've gone far enough, Jim?" said I, with my teeth chattering.

"I'll lift you in first."

"No, no, I'll not go first."

"Then I will." He gripped the sill, and had his knee on it in an instant. "Now, Roddy, give me your hands." With a pull he had me up beside him, and a moment later we were both in the haunted house.

How hollow it sounded when we jumped down on to the wooden floor! There was such a sudden boom and reverberation that we both stood silent for a moment. Then Jim burst out laughing.

"What an old drum of a place it is!" he cried; "we'll strike a light, Roddy, and see where we are."

He had brought a candle and a tinder-box in his pocket. When the flame burned up, we saw an arched stone roof above our heads, and broad deal shelves all round us covered with dusty dishes. It was the pantry.

"I'll show you round," said Jim, merrily; and, pushing the door open, he led the way into the hall. I remember the high, oak-panelled walls, with the heads of deer jutting out, and a single white bust, which sent my heart into my mouth, in the corner. Many rooms opened out of this, and we wandered from one to the other—the kitchens, the still-room, the morning-room, the dining-room, all filled with the same choking smell of dust and of mildew.

"This is where they played the cards, Jim," said I, in a hushed voice. "It was on that very table."

"Why, here are the cards themselves!" cried he; and he pulled a brown towel from something in the centre of the sideboard. Sure enough it was a pile of playing-cards—forty packs, I should think, at the least—which had lain there ever since that tragic game which was played before I was born.

"I wonder whence that stairs leads?" said Jim.

"Don't go up there, Jim!" I cried, clutching at his arm. "That must lead to the room of the murder."

"How do you know that?"

"The vicar said that they saw on the ceiling—— Oh, Jim, you can see it even now!"

He held up his candle, and there was a great, dark smudge upon the white plaster above us.

"I believe you're right," said he; "but anyhow I'm going to have a look at it."

"Don't, Jim, don't!" I cried.

"Tut, Roddy! you can stay here if you are afraid. I won't be more than a minute. There's no use going on a ghost hunt unless—— Great Lord, there's something coming down the stairs!"

I heard it too—a shuffling footstep in the room above, and then a creak from the steps, and then another creak, and another. I saw Jim's face as if it had been carved out of ivory, with his parted lips and his staring eyes fixed upon the black square of the stair opening. He still held the light, but his fingers twitched, and with every twitch the shadows sprang from the walls to the ceiling. As to myself, my knees gave way under me, and I found myself on the floor crouching down behind Jim, with a scream frozen in my throat. And still the step came slowly from stair to stair.

Then, hardly daring to look and yet unable to turn away my eyes, I saw a figure dimly outlined in the corner upon which the stair opened. There was a silence in which I could hear my poor heart thumping, and then when I looked again the figure was gone, and the low creak, creak was heard once more upon the stairs. Jim sprang after it, and I was left half-fainting in the moonlight.

But it was not for long. He was down again in a minute, and, passing his hand under my arm, he half led and half carried me out of the house. It was not until we were in the fresh night air again that he opened his mouth.

"Can you stand, Roddy?"

"Yes, but I'm shaking."

"So am I," said he, passing his hand over his forehead. "I ask your pardon, Roddy. I was a fool to bring you on such an errand. But I never believed in such things. I know better now."

"Could it have been a man, Jim?" I asked, plucking up my courage now that I could hear the dogs barking on the farms.

"It was a spirit, Rodney."

"How do you know?"

"Because I followed it, and saw it vanish into a wall, as easily as an eel into sand. Why, Roddy, what's amiss now?"

My fears were all back upon me, and every nerve creeping with horror.

"Take me away, Jim! Take me away!" I cried.

I was glaring down the avenue, and his eyes followed mine. Amid the gloom of the oak trees something was coming towards us.

"Quiet, Roddy!" whispered Jim. "By heavens, come what may, my arms are going round it this time."

We crouched as motionless as the trunks behind us. Heavy steps ploughed their way through the sift gravel and a broad figure loomed upon us in the darkness.

Jim sprang upon it like a tiger.

"*You're* not a spirit, anyway!" he cried.

The man gave a shout of surprise, and then [redacted] of age.

"What the deuce!" he roared, and then, "[redacted] your neck if you don't let go."

The threat might not have loosened Jim's grip, but the voice did.

"Why, uncle!" he cried.

"Well, I'm blessed if it isn't Boy Jim! And what's this? Why, it's young Master Rodney Stone, and I'm a living sinner! What in the world are you two doing up at Cliffe Royal at this time of night?"

We had all moved out into the moonlight, and there was Champion Harrison with a big bundle on his arm, and such a look of amazement upon his face as would have brought a smile back on to mine had my heart not still been cramped with fear.

"We're exploring," said Jim.

" Exploring, are you ? Well, I don't think you were meant to be Captain Cooks, either of you, for I never saw such a pair of peeled-turnip faces. Why, Jim, what are you afraid of ? "

" I'm not afraid, uncle. I never was afraid ; but its are new to me, and——"

its ? "

been in Cliffe Royal, and we've seen the ghost."

hampion gave a whistle.

t's the game, is it ? " said he. " Did you have ith it ? "

ished first."

hampion whistled once more.

eard there is something of the sort up yonder,"

but it's not a thing as I would advise you to ith. There's enough trouble with the folk of d, Boy Jim, without going out of your way to ith those of another. As to young Master tone, if his good mother saw that white face e'd never let him come to the smithy more. ly on, and I'll see you back to Friar's Oak."

gone half a mile, perhaps, when the Champion and I could not but observe that the bundle nger under his arm. We were nearly at the ore Jim asked the question which was already d.

took *you* up to Cliffe Royal, uncle ? "

a man gets on in years," said the Champion, y a duty turns up that the likes of you have f. When you're near forty yourself, you'll w the truth of what I say."

was all we could draw from him ; but, young had heard of coast smuggling and of packages lonely places at night, so that from that time heard that the preventives had made a capture, r easy until I saw the jolly face of Champion king out of his smithy door.

3. *The Play-actress of Anstey Cross*

HAVE told you something about Friar's Oak, and about the life that we led there. Now that my memory goes back to the old place it would gladly linger, for every thread which I draw from the skein of the past brings out half a dozen others that were entangled with it. I was in two minds when I began whether I had enough in me to make a book of, and now I know that I could write one about Friar's Oak alone, and the folk whom I knew in my childhood. They were hard and uncouth, some of them, I doubt not; and yet, seen through the golden haze of time, they all seem sweet and lovable. There was our good vicar, Mr. Jefferson, who loved the whole world save only Mr. Slack, the Baptist minister of Clayton; and there was kindly Mr. Slack, who was all men's brother save only of Mr. Jefferson, the vicar of Friar's Oak. Then there was Monsieur Rudin, the French Royalist refugee who lived over on the Pangdean road, and who, when the news of a victory came in, was convulsed with joy because we had beaten Buonaparte, and shaken with rage because we had beaten the French, so that after the Nile he wept for a whole day out of delight and then for another one out of fury, alternately clapping his hands and stamping his feet. Well I remember his thin, upright figure and the way in which he jauntily twirled his little cane; for cold and hunger could not cast him down, though we knew that he had his share of both. Yet he was so proud and had such a grand manner of talking, that no one dared to offer him a cloak or a meal. I can see his face now, with a flush over each craggy cheek-bone when the butcher made him the present of some ribs of beef. He could not but take it, and yet whilst he was stalking off he threw a proud glance over his shoulder at the butcher, and he said, "Monsieur, I have a dog!" Yet it was Monsieur Rudin and not his dog who looked plumper for a week to come.

Then I remember Mr. Paterson, the farmer, who was what you would now call a Radical, though at that time some called him a Priestley-ite, and some a Fox-ite, and nearly everybody a traitor. It certainly seemed to me, at the time, to be very wicked that a man should look glum when he heard of a British victory; and when they burned his straw image at the gate of his farm, Boy Jim and I were among those who lent a hand. But we were bound to confess that he was game, though he might be a traitor, for down he came, striding into the midst of us with his brown coat and his buckled shoes, and the fire beating upon his grim, schoolmaster face. My word, how he rated us, and how glad we were at last to sneak quietly away.

"You livers of a lie?" said he. "You and those like you have been preaching peace for nigh two thousand years, and cutting throats the whole time. If the money that is lost in taking French lives were spent in saving English ones, you would have more right to burn candles in your windows. Who are you that dare to come here to insult a law-abiding man?"

"We are the people of England!" cried young Master Ovington, the son of the Tory Squire.

"You! you horse-racing, cock-fighting ne'er-do-weel! Do you presume to talk for the people of England? They are a deep, strong, silent stream, and you are the scum, the bubbles, the poor, silly froth that floats upon the surface."

We thought him very wicked then, but, looking back, I am not sure that we were not very wicked ourselves.

And then there were the smugglers! The Downs swarmed with them, for since there might be no lawful trade betwixt France and England, it had all to run in that channel. I have been up on St. John's Common upon a dark night, and, lying among the bracken, I have seen as many as seventy mules and a man at the head of each go flitting past me as silently as trout in a stream. Not one of them but bore its two ankers of the right

French cognac or its bale of silk of Lyons and lace of Valenciennes. I knew Dan Scales, the head of them, and I knew Tom Hislop, the riding officer, and I remember the night they met.

"Do you fight, Dan?" asked Tom.

"Yes, Tom; thou must fight for it."

On which Tom drew his pistol, and blew Dan's brains out.

"It was a sad thing to do," he said afterwards, "but I knew Dan was too good a man for me, for we tried it out before."

It was Tom who paid a poet from Brighton to write the lines for the tombstone, which we all thought were very true and good, beginning—

> "Alas! Swift flew the fatal lead
> Which piercéd through the young man's head.
> He instantly fell, resigned his breath,
> And closed his languid eyes in death."

There was more of it, and I dare say it is all still to be read in Patcham Churchyard.

One day, about the time of our Cliffe Royal adventure, I was seated in the cottage looking round at the curios which my father had fastened on to the walls, and wishing, like the lazy lad that I was, that Mr. Lilly had died before ever he wrote his Latin grammar, when my mother, who was sitting knitting in the window, gave a little cry of surprise.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "What a vulgar-looking woman!"

It was so rare to hear my mother say a hard word against anybody (unless it were General Buonaparte) that I was acro.. the room and at the window in a jump. A pony-chaise was coming slowly down the village street, and in it was the queerest-looking person that I had ever seen. She was very stout, with a face that was of so dark a red that it shaded away into purple over the nose and cheeks. She wore a great hat with a white curling

ostrich feather, and from under its brim her two bold, black eyes stared out with a look of anger and defiance as if to tell the folk that she thought less of them than they could do of her. She had some sort of scarlet pelisse with white swansdown about her neck, and she held the reins slack in her hands, while the pony wandered from side to side of the road as the fancy took him. Each time the chaise swayed, her head with the great hat swayed also, so that sometimes we saw the crown of it and sometimes the brim.

"What a dreadful sight!" cried my mother.

"What is amiss with her, mother?"

"Heaven forgive me if I misjudge her, Rodney, but I think that the unfortunate woman has been drinking."

"Why," I cried, "she has pulled the chaise up at the smithy. I'll find out all the news for you"; and, catching up my cap, away I scampered.

Champion Harrison had been shoeing a horse at the forge door, and when I got into the street I could see him with the creature's hoof still under his arm, and the rasp in his hand, kneeling down amid the white parings. The woman was beckoning him from the chaise, and he staring up at her with the queerest expression upon his face. Presently he threw down his rasp and went across to her, standing by the wheel and shaking his head as he talked to her. For my part, I slipped into the smithy, where Boy Jim was finishing the shoe, and I watched the neatness of his work and the deft way in which he turned up the caulkens. When he had done with it he carried it out, and there was the strange woman still talking with his uncle.

"Is that he?" I heard her ask.

Champion Harrison nodded.

She looked at Jim, and I never saw such eyes in a human head, so large, and black, and wonderful. Boy as I was, I knew that, in spite of that bloated face, this woman had once been very beautiful. She put out a hand, with all the fingers going as if she were playing

on the harpsichord, and she touched Jim on the shoulder.

" I hope—I hope you're well," she stammered.

" Very well, ma'am," said Jim, staring from her to his uncle.

" And happy too ? "

" Yes, ma'am, I thank you."

" Nothing that you crave for ? "

" Why, no, ma'am, I have all that I lack."

" That will do, Jim," said his uncle, in a stern voice. " Blow up the forge again, for that shoe wants re-heating."

But it seemed as if the woman had something else that she would say, for she was angry that he should be sent away. Her eyes gleamed, and her head tossed, while the smith with his two big hands outspread seemed to be soothing her as best he could. For a long time they whispered until at last she appeared to be satisfied.

" To-morrow, then ? " she cried loud out.

" To-morrow," he answered.

" You keep your word and I'll keep mine," said she, and dropped the lash on the pony's back. The smith stood with the rasp in his hand, looking after her until she was just a little red spot on the white road. Then he turned, and I never saw his face so grave.

" Jim," said he, " that's Miss Hinton, who has come to live at The Maples, out Anstey Cross way. She's taken a kind of a fancy to you, Jim, and maybe she can help you on a bit. I promised her that you would go over and see her to-morrow."

" I don't want her help, uncle, and I don't want to see her."

" But I've promised, Jim, and you wouldn't make me out a liar. She does but want to talk with you, for it is a lonely life she leads."

" What would she want to talk with such as me about ? "

" Why, I cannot say that, but she seemed very set upon it, and women have their fancies. There's young Master Stone here who wouldn't refuse to go and see a good

lady, I'll warrant, if he thought he might better his fortune by doing so."

"Well, uncle, I'll go if Roddy Stone will go with me," said Jim.

"Of course he'll go. Won't you, Master Rodney?"

So it ended in my saying "yes," and back I went with all my news to my mother, who dearly loved a little bit of gossip. She shook her head when she heard where I was going, but she did not say nay, and so it was settled.

It was a good four miles of a walk, but when we reached it you would not wish to see a more cosy little house: all honeysuckle and creepers, with a wooden porch and lattice windows. A common-looking woman opened the door for us.

"Miss Hinton cannot see you," said she.

"But she asked us to come," said Jim.

"I can't help that," cried the woman, in a rude voice. "I tell you that she can't see you."

We stood irresolute for a minute.

"Maybe you would just tell her I am here," said Jim, at last.

"Tell her! How am I to tell her when she couldn't so much as hear a pistol in her ears? Try and tell her yourself, if you have a mind to."

She threw open a door as she spoke, and there, in a reclining chair at the further end of the room, we caught a glimpse of a figure all lumped together, huge and shapeless, with tails of black hair hanging down. The sound of dreadful, swine-like breathing fell upon our ears. It was but a glance, and then we were off hot-foot for home. As for me, I was so young that I was not sure whether this was funny or terrible; but when I looked at Jim to see how he took it, he was looking quite white and ill.

"You'll not tell anyone, Roddy," said he.

"Not unless it's my mother."

"I won't even tell my uncle. I'll say she was ill, the poor lady! It's enough that we should have seen her in

her shame, without its being the gossip of the village. It makes me feel sick and heavy at heart."

"She was so yesterday, Jim."

"Was she? I never marked it. But I know that she has kind eyes and a kind heart, for I saw the one in the other when she looked at me. Maybe it's the want of a friend that has driven her to this."

It blighted his spirits for days, and when it had all gone from my mind it was brought back to me by his manner. But it was not to be our last memory of the lady with the scarlet pelisse, for before the week was out Jim came round to ask me if I would again go up with him.

"My uncle has had a letter," said he. "She would speak with me, and I would be easier if you came with me, Rod."

For me it was only a pleasure outing, but I could see, as we drew near the house, that Jim was troubling in his mind lest we should find that things were amiss. His fears were soon set at rest, however, for we had scarce clicked the garden gate before the woman was out of the door of the cottage and running down the path to meet us. She was so strange a figure, with some sort of purple wrapper on, and her big, flushed face smiling out of it, that I might, if I had been alone, have taken to my heels at the sight of her. Even Jim stopped for a moment as if he were not very sure of himself, but her hearty ways soon set us at our ease.

"It is indeed good of you to come and see an old, lonely woman," said she, "and I owe you an apology that I should give you a fruitless journey on Tuesday, but in a sense you were yourselves the cause of it, since the thought of your coming had excited me, and any excitement throws me into a nervous fever. My poor nerves! You can see for yourselves how they serve me."

She held out her twitching hands as she spoke. Then she passed one of them through Jim's arm, and walked with him up the path.

"You must let me know you, and know you well," said she. "Your uncle and aunt are quite old acquaintances of mine, and though you cannot remember me, I have held you in my arms when you were an infant. Tell me, little man," she added, turning to me, "what do you call your friend?"

"Boy Jim, ma'am," said I.

"Then if you will not think me forward, I will call you Boy Jim also. We elderly people have our privileges, you know. And now you shall come in with me, and we will take a dish of tea together."

She led the way into a cosy room—the same which we had caught a glimpse of when last we came—and there, in the middle, was a table with white napery, and shining glass, and gleaming china, and red-cheeked apples piled upon a centre-dish, and a great plateful of smoking muffins which the cross-faced maid had just carried in. You can think that we did justice to all the good things, and Miss Hinton would ever keep pressing us to pass our cup and to fill our plate. Twice during our meal she rose from her chair and withdrew into a cupboard at the end of the room, and each time I saw Jim's face cloud, for we heard a gentle clink of glass against glass.

"Come now, little man," said she to me, when the table had been cleared. "Why are you looking round so much?"

"Because there are so many pretty things upon the walls."

"And which do you think the prettiest of them?"

"Why, that!" said I, pointing to a picture which hung opposite to me. It was of a tall and slender girl, with the rosiest cheeks and the tenderest eyes—so daintily dressed, too, that I had never seen anything more perfect. She had a posy of flowers in her hand and another one was lying upon the planks of wood upon which she was standing.

"Oh, that's the prettiest, is it?" said she, laughing. "Well, now, walk up to it, and let us hear what is writ beneath it."

I did as she asked, and read out : " Miss Polly Hinton, as ' Peggy,' in *The Country Wife*, played for her benefit at the Haymarket Theatre, September 14th, 1782."

" It's a play-actress," said I.

" Oh, you rude little boy, to say it in such a tone," said she ; " as if a play-actress wasn't as good as anyone else. Why, 'twas but the other day that the Duke of Clarence, who may come to call himself King of England, married Mrs. Jordan, who is herself only a play-actress. And whom think you that this one is ? "

She stood under the picture with her arms folded across her great body, and her big black eyes looking from one to the other of us.

" Why, where are your eyes ? " she cried at last. " *I* was Miss Polly Hinton of the Haymarket Theatre. And perhaps you never heard the name before ? "

We were compelled to confess that we never had. And the very name of play-actress had filled us both with a kind of vague horror, like the country-bred folk that we were. To us they were a class apart, to be hinted at rather than named, with the wrath of the Almighty hanging over them like a thundercloud. Indeed, His judgments seemed to be in visible operation before us when we looked upon what this woman was, and what she had been.

" Well," said she, laughing like one who is hurt, " you have no cause to say anything, for I read on your face what you have been taught to think of me. So this is the upbringing that you have had, Jim—to think evil of that which you do not understand ! I wish you had been in the theatre that very night with Prince Florizel and four Dukes in the boxes, and all the wits and macaronis of London rising at me in the pit. If Lord Avon had not given me a cast in his carriage, I had never got my flowers back to my lodgings in York Street, Westminster. And now two little country lads are sitting in judgment upon me ! "

Jim's pride brought a flush on to his cheeks, for he did

not like to be called a country lad, or to have it supposed that he was so far behind the grand folk in London.

"I have never been inside a play-house," said he; "I know nothing of them."

"Nor I either."

"Well," said she, "I am not in voice, and it is ill to play in a little room with but two to listen, but you must conceive me to be the Queen of the Peruvians, who is exhorting her countrymen to rise up against the Spaniards, who are oppressing them."

And straightway that coarse, swollen woman became a queen—the grandest, haughtiest queen that you could dream of—and she turned upon us with such words of fire, such lightning eyes and sweeping of her white hand, that she held us spellbound in our chairs. Her voice was soft and sweet, and persuasive at the first, but louder it rang and louder as it spoke of wrongs and freedom and the joys of death in a good cause, until it thrilled into my every nerve, and I asked nothing more than to run out of the cottage and to die then and there in the cause of my country. And then in an instant she changed. She was a poor woman now, who had lost her only child, and who was bewailing it. Her voice was full of tears, and what she said was so simple, so true, that we both seemed to see the dead babe stretched there on the carpet before us, and we could have joined in with words of pity and grief. And then, before our cheeks were dry, she was back into her old self again.

"How like you that, then?" she cried. "That was my way in the days when Sally Siddons would turn green at the name of Polly Hinton. It's a fine play, is *Pizarro*."

"And who wrote it, ma'am?"

"Who wrote it? I never heard. What matter who did the writing of it! But there are some great lines for one who knows how they should be spoken."

"And you play no longer, ma'am?"

"No, Jim, I left the boards when—when I was weary of them. But my heart goes back to them sometimes.

It seems to me there is no smell like that of the hot oil in the footlights and of the oranges in the pit. But you are sad, Jim."

"It was but the thought of that poor woman and her child."

"Tut, never think about her! I will soon wipe her from your mind. This is 'Miss Priscilla Tomboy,' from *The Romp*. You must conceive that the mother is speaking, and that the forward young minx is answering."

And she began a scene between the two of them, so exact in voice and manner that it seemed to us as if there were really two folk before us: the stern old mother with her hand up like an ear-trumpet, and her flouncing, bouncing daughter. Her great figure danced about with a wonderful lightness, and she tossed her head and pouted her lips as she answered back to the old, bent figure that addressed her. Jim and I had forgotten our tears, and were holding our ribs before she came to the end of it.

"That is better," said she, smiling at our laughter. "I would not have you go back to Friar's Oak with long faces, or maybe they would not let you come to me again."

She vanished into her cupboard, and came out with a bottle and glass, which she placed upon the table.

"You are too young for strong waters," she said, "but this talking gives one a dryness, and——"

Then it was that Boy Jim did a wonderful thing. He rose from his chair, and he laid his hand upon the bottle.

"Don't!" said he.

She looked him in the face, and I can still see those black eyes of hers softening before the gaze.

"Am I to have none?"

"Please, don't."

With a quick movement she wrested the bottle out of his hand and raised it up so that for a moment it entered my head that she was about to drink it off. Then she flung it through the open lattice, and we heard the crash of it on the path outside.

"There, Jim!" said she; "does that satisfy you? It's long since anyone cared whether I drank or no."

"You are too good and kind for that," said he.

"Good!" she cried. "Well, I love that you should think me so. And it would make you happier if I kept from the brandy, Jim? Well, then, I'll make you a promise, if you'll make me one in return."

"What's that, miss?"

"No drop shall pass my lips, Jim, if you will swear, wet or shine, blow or snow, to come up here twice in every week, that I may see you and speak with you, for, indeed, there are times when I am very lonesome."

So the promise was made, and very faithfully did Jim keep it, for many a time when I have wanted him to go fishing or rabbit-snaring, he has remembered that it was his day for Miss Hinton, and has tramped off to Anstey Cross. At first I think that she found her share of the bargain hard to keep, and I have seen Jim come back with a black face on him, as if things were going amiss. But after a time the fight was won—as all fights are won if one does but fight long enough—and in the year before my father came back Miss Hinton had become another woman. And it was not her ways only, but herself as well, for from being the person that I have described, she became in one twelvemonth as fine a looking lady as there was in the whole country-side. Jim was prouder of it by far than of anything he had had a hand in in his life, but it was only to me that he ever spoke about it, for he had that tenderness towards her that one has for those whom one has helped. And she helped him also, for by her talk of the world and of what she had seen, she took his mind away from the Sussex country-side and prepared it for a broader life beyond. So matters stood between them at the time when peace was made and my father came home from the sea.

4. *The Peace of Amiens*

MANY a woman's knee was on the ground, and many a woman's soul spent itself in joy and thankfulness when the news came with the fall of the leaf in 1801 that the preliminaries of peace had been settled. All England waved her gladness by day and twinkled it by night. Even in little Friar's Oak we had our flags flying bravely, and a candle in every window, with a big G.R. guttering in the wind over the door of the inn. Folk were weary of the war, for we had been at it for eight years, taking Holland, and Spain, and France each in turn and all together. All that we had learned during that time was that our little army was no match for the French on land, and that our large navy was more than a match for them upon the water. We had gained some credit, which we were sorely in need of after the American business; and a few Colonies, which were welcome also for the same reason; but our debt had gone on rising and our consols sinking, until even Pitt stood aghast. Still, if we had known that there never could be peace between Napoleon and ourselves, and that this was only the end of a round and not of the battle, we should have been better advised had we fought it out without a break. As it was, the French got back the twenty thousand good seamen whom we had captured, and a fine dance they led us with their Boulogne flotillas and fleets of invasion before we were able to catch them again.

My father, as I remember him best, was a tough, strong little man, of no great breadth, but solid and well put together. His face was burned of a reddish colour, as bright as a flower-pot, and in spite of his age (for he was only forty at the time of which I speak) it was shot with lines, which deepened if he were in any way perturbed, so that I have seen him turn on the instant from a youngish man to an elderly. His eyes especially were

meshed round with wrinkles, as is natural for one who had puckered them all his life in facing foul wind and bitter weather. These eyes were, perhaps, his strangest feature, for they were of a very clear and beautiful blue, which shone the brighter out of that ruddy setting. By nature he must have been a fair-skinned man, for his upper brow, where his cap came over it, was as white as mine, and his close-cropped hair was tawny.

He had served, as he was proud to say, in the last of our ships which had been chased out of the Mediterranean in '97, and in the first which had re-entered it in '98. He was under Miller, as third lieutenant of the *Theseus*, when our fleet, like a pack of eager foxhounds in a covert, was dashing from Sicily to Syria and back again to Naples, trying to pick up the lost scent. With the same good fighting man he served at the Nile, where the men of his command sponged and rammed and trained until, when the last tricolour had come down, they hove up the sheet anchor and fell dead asleep upon the top of each other under the capstan bars. Then, as a second lieutenant, he was in one of those grim three-deckers with powder-blackened hulls and crimson scupper-holes, their spare cables tied round their keels and over their bulwarks to hold them together, which carried the news into the Bay of Naples. From thence, as a reward for his services, he was transferred as first lieutenant to the *Aurora* frigate, engaged in cutting off supplies from Genoa, and in her he still remained until long after peace was declared.

How well I can remember his home-coming! Though it is now eight-and forty years ago, it is clearer to me than the doings of last week, for the memory of an old man is like one of those glasses which show out what is at a distance and blur all that is near.

My mother had been in a tremble ever since the first rumour of the preliminaries came to our ears, for she knew that he might come as soon as his message. She said little, but she saddened my life by insisting that I

should be for ever clean and tidy. With every rumble of wheels, too, her eyes would glance towards the door, and her hands steal up to smooth her pretty black hair. She had embroidered a white " Welcome " upon a blue ground, with an anchor in red upon each side, and a border of laurel leaves ; and this was to hang upon the two lilac bushes which flanked the cottage door. He could not have left the Mediterranean before we had this finished, and every morning she looked to see if it were in its place and ready to be hanged.

But it was a weary time before the peace was ratified, and it was April of next year before our great day came round to us. It had been raining all morning, I remember—a soft spring rain, which sent up a rich smell from the brown earth and pattered pleasantly upon the budding chestnuts behind our cottage. The sun had shone out in the evening, and I had come down with my fishing-rod (for I had promised Boy Jim to go with him to the mill-stream), when what should I see but a post-chaise with two smoking horses at the gate, and there in the open door of it were my mother's black skirt and her little feet jutting out, with two blue arms for a waist-belt, and all the rest of her buried in the chaise. Away I ran for the motto, and I pinned it up on the bushes as we had agreed, but when I had finished there were the skirt and the feet and the blue arms just the same as before.

" Here's Rod," said my mother at last, struggling down on to the ground again. " Roddy, darling, here's your father ! "

I saw the red face and the kindly, light-blue eyes looking out at me.

" Why, Roddy, lad, you were but a child and we kissed good-bye when last we met ; but I suppose we must put you on a different rating now. I'm right glad from my heart to see you, dear lad ; and as to you, sweetheart——" The blue arms flew out and there were the skirt and the two feet fixed in the door again.

" Here are the folk coming, Anson," said my mother,

blushing. "Won't you get out and come in with us?"

And then suddenly it came home to us both that for all his cheery face he had never moved more than his arms, and that his leg was resting on the opposite seat of the chaise.

"Oh, Anson, Anson!" she cried.

"Tut, 'tis but the bone of my leg," said he, taking his knee between his hands and lifting it round. "I got it broke in the Bay, but the surgeon has fished it and spliced it, though it's a bit crank yet. Why, bless her kindly heart, if I haven't turned her from pink to white. You can see for yourself that it's nothing."

He sprang out as he spoke, and with one leg and a staff he hopped swiftly up the path, and under the laurel-bordered motto, and so over his own threshold for the first time for five years. When the post-boy and I had carried up the sea-chest and the two canvas bags, there he was sitting in his armchair by the window in his old weather-stained blue coat. My mother was weeping over his poor leg, and he patting her hair with one brown hand. His other he threw round my waist, and drew me to the side of his chair.

"Now that we have peace, I can lie up and refit until King George needs me again," said he. "'Twas a carronade that came adrift in the Bay when it was blowing a top-gallant breeze with a beam sea. Ere we could make it fast it had me jammed against the mast. Well, well," he added, looking round at the walls of the room, "here are all my old curios, the same as ever: the narwhal's horn from the Arctic, and the blowfish from the Moluccas, and the paddles from Fiji, and the picture of the *Ça Ira* with Lord Hotham in chase. And here you are, Mary, and you also, Roddy, and good luck to the carronade which has sent me into so snug a harbour without fear of sailing orders."

My mother had his long pipe and his tobacco all ready for him, so that he was able now to light it and to sit look-

ing from one of us to the other and then back again, as if he could never see enough of us. Young as I was, I could still understand that this was the moment which he had thought of during many a lonely watch, and that the expectation of it had cheered his heart in many a dark hour. Sometimes he would touch one of us with his hand, and sometimes the other, and so he sat, with his soul too satiated for words, whilst the shadows gathered in the little room and the lights of the inn windows glimmered through the gloom. And then, after my mother had lit our own lamp, she slipped suddenly down upon her knees, and he got one knee to the ground also, so that, hand-in-hand, they joined their thanks to Heaven for manifold mercies. When I look back at my parents as they were in those days, it is at that very moment that I can picture them most clearly : her sweet face with the wet shining upon her cheeks, and his blue eyes upturned to the smoke-blackened ceiling. I remember that he swayed his reeking pipe in the earnestness of his prayer, so that I was half tears and half smiles as I watched him.

" Roddy, lad," said he, after supper was over, " you're getting a man now, and I suppose you will go afloat like the rest of us. You're old enough to strap a dirk to your thigh."

" And leave me without a child as well as without a husband ! " cried my mother.

" Well, there's time enough yet," said he, " for they are more inclined to empty berths than to fill them, now that peace has come. But I've never tried what all this schooling has done for you, Rodney. You have had a great deal more than ever I had, but I dare say I can make shift to test it. Have you learned history ? "

" Yes, father," said I, with some confidence.

" Then how many sail of the line were at the Battle of Camperdown ? "

He shook his head gravely, when he found that I could not answer him.

" Why, there are men in the fleet who never had any

schooling at all who could tell you that we had seven 74's, seven 64's and two 50-gun ships in the action. There's a picture on the wall of the chase of the *Ça Ira*. Which were the ships that laid her aboard ? "

Again I had to confess that he had beaten me.

" Well, your dad can teach you something in history yet," he cried, looking in triumph at my mother. " Have you learned geography ? "

" Yes, father," said I, though with less confidence than before.

" Well, how far is it from Port Mahon to Algeçiras ? "

I could only shake my head.

" If Ushant lay three leagues upon your starboard quarter, what would be your nearest English port ? "

Again I had to give it up.

" Well, I don't see that your geography is much better than your history," said he. " You'd never get your certificate at this rate. Can you do addition ? Well, then, let us see if you can tot up my prize-money."

He shot a mischievous glance at my mother as he spoke, and she laid down her knitting on her lap and looked very earnestly at him.

" You never asked me about that, Mary," said he.

" The Mediterranean is not the station for it, Anson. I have heard you say that it is the Atlantic for prize-money, and the Mediterranean for honour."

" I had a share of both last cruise, which comes from changing a line-of-battle ship for a frigate. Now, Rodney, there are two pounds in every hundred due to me when the prize-courts have done with them. When we were watching Massena, off Genoa, we got a matter of seventy schooners, brigs and tartans, with wine, food and powder. Lord Keith will want his finger in the pie, but that's for the Courts to settle. Put them at four pounds apiece to me, and what will the seventy bring ? "

" Two hundred and eighty pounds," I answered.

" Why, Anson, it is a fortune ! " cried my mother, clapping her hands.

"Try you again, Roddy!" said he, shaking his pipe at me. "There was the *Xebec* frigate out of Barcelona with twenty thousand Spanish dollars aboard, which make four thousand of our pounds. Her hull should be worth another thousand. What's my share of that?"

"A hundred pounds."

"Why, the purser couldn't work it out quicker," he cried in his delight. "Here's for you again! We passed the Straits and worked up to the Azores, where we fell in with the *La Sabina* from the Mauritius with sugar and spices. Twelve hundred pounds she's worth to me, Mary, my darling, and never again shall you soil your pretty fingers, or pinch upon my beggarly pay."

My dear mother had borne her long struggle without a sign all these years, but now that she was so suddenly eased of it she fell sobbing upon his neck. It was a long time before my father had a thought to spare upon my examination in arithmetic.

"It's all in your lap, Mary," said he, dashing his own hand across his eyes. "By George, lass, when this leg of mine is sound we'll bear down for a spell to Brighton, and if there is a smarter frock than yours upon the Steyne, may I never tread a poop again. But how is it that you are so quick at figures, Rodney, when you know nothing of history or geography?"

I tried to explain that addition was the same upon sea or land, but that history and geography were not.

"Well," he concluded, "you need figures to take a reckoning, and you need nothing else save what your mother wit will teach you. There never was one of our breed who did not take to salt water like a young gull. Lord Nelson has promised me a vacancy for you, and he'll be as good as his word."

So it was that my father came home to us, and a better or kinder no lad could wish for. Though my parents had been married so long, they had really seen very little of each other, and their affection was as warm and as fresh as if they were two newly-wedded lovers. I have learned

since that sailors can be coarse and foul, but never did I know it from my father; for, although he had seen as much rough work as the wildest could wish for, he was always the same patient, good-humoured man, with a smile and a jolly word for all the village. He could suit himself to his company, too, for on the one hand he could take his wine with the vicar, or with Sir James Ovington, the squire of the parish; while on the other he would sit by the hour amongst my humble friends down in the smithy, with Champion Harrison, Boy Jim and the rest of them, telling them such stories of Nelson and his men that I have seen the Champion knot his great hands together, while Jim's eyes have smouldered like the forge embers as he listened.

My father had been placed on half-pay, like so many others of the old war officers, and so, for nearly two years, he was able to remain with us. During all this time I can only once remember that there was the slightest disagreement between him and my mother. It chanced that I was the cause of it, and as great events sprang out of it, I must tell you how it came about. It was indeed the first of a series of events which affected not only my fortunes, but those of very much more important people.

The spring of 1803 was an early one, and the middle of April saw the leaves thick upon the chestnut trees. One evening we were all seated together over a dish of tea when we heard the scrunch of steps outside our door, and there was the postman with a letter in his hand.

"I think it is for me," said my mother, and sure enough it was addressed in the most beautiful writing to Mrs. Mary Stone, of Friar's Oak, and there was a red seal the size of a half-crown upon the outside of it with a flying dragon in the middle.

"Whom think you that it is from, Anson?" she asked.

"I had hoped that it was from Lord Nelson," answered my father. "It is time the boy had his commission. But if it be for you, then it cannot be from anyone of much importance."

"Can it not?" she cried, pretending to be offended. "You will ask my pardon for that speech, sir, for it is from no less a person than Sir Charles Tregellis, my own brother."

My mother seemed to speak with a hushed voice when she mentioned this wonderful brother of hers, and always had done as long as I can remember, so that I had learned also to have a subdued and reverent feeling when I heard his name. And indeed it was no wonder, for that name was never mentioned unless it were in connection with something brilliant and extraordinary. Once we heard that he was at Windsor with the King. Often he was at Brighton with the Prince. Sometimes it was as a sportsman that his reputation reached us, as when his Meteor beat the Duke of Queensberry's Egham, at Newmarket, or when he brought Jim Belcher up from Bristol, and sprang him upon the London Fancy. But usually it was as the friend of the great, the arbiter of fashions, the king of bucks and the best-dressed man in town, that his reputation reached us. My father, however, did not appear to be elated at my mother's triumphant rejoinder.

"Aye, and what does he want?" asked he, in no very amiable voice.

"I wrote to him, Anson, and told him that Rodney was growing a man now, thinking, since he had no wife or child of his own, he might be disposed to advance him."

"We can do very well without him," growled my father. "He sheered off from us when the weather was foul, and we have no need of him now that the sun is shining."

"Nay, you misjudge him, Anson," said my mother, warmly. "There is no one with a better heart than Charles; but his own life moves so smoothly that he cannot understand that others may have trouble. During all these years I have known that I had but to say the word to receive as much as I wished from him."

"Thank God that you never had to stoop to it, Mary. I want none of his help."

"But we must think of Rodney."

"Rodney has enough for his sea-chest and kit. He needs no more."

"But Charles has great power and influence in London. He could make Rodney known to all the great people. Surely you would not stand in the way of his advancement."

"Let us hear what he says, then," said my father; and this was the letter which she read to him—

"14, JERMYN STREET, ST. JAMES'S,
"*April* 15, 1803.

"MY DEAR SISTER MARY,

"In answer to your letter, I can assure you that you must not conceive me to be wanting in those finer feelings which are the chief adornment of humanity. It is true that for some years, absorbed as I have been in affairs of the highest importance, I have seldom taken a pen in hand, for which I can assure you that I have been reproached by many *des plus charmantes* of your charming sex. At the present moment I lie abed (having stayed late in order to pay a compliment to the Marchioness of Dover at her ball last night), and this is writ to my dictation by Ambrose, my clever rascal of a valet. I am interested to hear of my nephew Rodney (*Mon dieu, quel nom!*), and as I shall be on my way to visit the Prince at Brighton next week, I shall break my journey at Friar's Oak for the sake of seeing both you and him. Make my compliments to your husband.

"I am ever, my dear sister Mary,
"Your brother,
"CHARLES TREGELLIS."

"What do you think of that?" cried my mother in triumph when she had finished.

"I think it is the letter of a fop," said my father, bluntly.

"You are too hard on him, Anson. You will think

better of him when you know him. But he says that he will be here next week, and this is Thursday, and the best curtains unhung, and no lavender in the sheets!"

Away she bustled, half distracted, while my father sat moody, and his chin upon his hands, and I remained lost in wonder at the thought of this grand new relative from London, and of all that his coming might mean to us.

5. *Buck Tregellis*

NOW that I was in my seventeenth year, and had already some need for a razor, I had begun to weary of the narrow life of the village, and to long to see something of the great world beyond. The craving was all the stronger because I durst not speak openly about it, for the least hint of it brought the tears into my mother's eyes. But now there was the less reason that I should stay at home, since my father was at her side, and so my mind was all filled by this prospect of my uncle's visit, and of the chance that he might set my feet moving at last upon the road of life.

As you may think, it was towards my father's profession that my thoughts and my hopes turned, for from my childhood I have never seen the heave of the sea or tasted the salt upon my lips without feeling the blood of five generations of seamen thrill within my veins. And think of the challenge which was ever waving in those days before the eyes of a coast-living lad! I had but to walk up to Wolstonbury in the war time to see the sails of the French chasse-marées and privateers. Again and again I have heard the roar of the guns coming from far out over the waters. Seamen would tell us how they had left London and been engaged ere nightfall, or sailed out of Portsmouth and been yard-arm to yard-arm before they had lost sight of St. Helen's light. It was this imminence of the danger which warmed our hearts to our sailors, and made us talk, round the winter fires, of our little Nelson, and

Cuddie Collingwood, and Johnnie Jarvis, and the rest of them, not as being great High Admirals with titles and dignities, but as good friends whom we loved and honoured above all others. What boy was there through the length and breath of Britain who did not long to be out with them under the red-cross flag ?

But now that peace had come, and the fleets which had swept the Channel and the Mediterranean were lying dismantled in our harbours, there was less to draw one's fancy seawards. It was London now of which I thought by day and brooded by night : the huge city, the home of the wise and the great, from which came this constant stream of carriages, and those crowds of dusty people who were for ever flashing past our window-pane. It was this one side of life which first presented itself to me, and so, as a boy, I used to picture the City as a gigantic stable with a huge huddle of coaches, which were for ever streaming off down the country roads. But, then, Champion Harrison told me how the fighting-men lived there, and my father how the heads of the Navy lived there, and my mother how her brother and his grand friends were there, until at last I was consumed with impatience to see this marvellous heart of England. This coming of my uncle, then, was the breaking of light through the darkness, though I hardly dared to hope that he would take me with him into those high circles in which he lived. My mother, however, had such confidence either in his good nature or in her own powers of persuasion, that she already began to make furtive preparations for my departure.

But if the narrowness of the village life chafed my easy spirit, it was a torture to the keen and ardent mind of Boy Jim. It was but a few days after the coming of my uncle's letter that we walked over the Downs together, and I had a peep of the bitterness of his heart.

" What is there for me to do, Rodney ? " he cried. " I forge a shoe, and I fuller it, and I clip it, and I caulken it, and I knock five holes in it, and there it is

finished. Then I do it again and again, and blow up the bellows and feed the forge, and rasp a hoof or two, and there is a day's work done, and every day the same as the other. Was it for this only, do you think, that I was born into the world ? "

I looked at him, his proud, eagle face, and his tall, sinewy figure, and I wondered whether in the whole land there was a finer, handsomer man.

" The Army or the Navy is the place for you, Jim," said I.

" That is very well," he cried. " If you go into the Navy, as you are likely to do, you go as an officer, and it is you who do the ordering. If I go in, it is as one who was born to receive orders."

" An officer gets his orders from those above him."

" But an officer does not have the lash hung over his head. I saw a poor fellow at the inn here—it was some years ago—who showed us his back in the tap-room, all cut into red diamonds with the boatswain's whip. ' Who ordered that ? ' I asked. ' The captain,' said he. ' And what would you have had if you had struck him dead ? ' said I. ' The yard-arm,' he answered. ' Then if I had been you that's where I should have been,' said I, and I spoke the truth. I can't help it, Rod ! There's something here in my heart, something that is as much a part of myself as this hand is, which holds me to it."

" I know that you are as proud as Lucifer," said I.

" It was born with me, Roddy, and I can't help it. Life would be easier if I could. I was made to be my own master, and there's only one place where I can hope to be so."

" Where is that, Jim ? "

" In London. Miss Hinton has told me of it, until I feel as if I could find my way through it from end to end. She loves to talk of it as well as I do to listen. I have it all laid out in my mind, and I can see where the playhouses are, and how the river runs, and where the King's house is, and the Prince's, and the place where

the fighting-men live. I could make my name known in London."

"How?"

"Never mind how, Rod. I could do it, and I will do it, too. 'Wait!' says my uncle—'wait, and it will all come right for you.' That is what he always says, and my aunt the same. Why should I wait? What am I to wait for? No, Roddy, I'll stay no longer eating my heart out in this little village, but I'll leave my apron behind me, and I'll seek my fortune in London, and when I come back to Friar's Oak, it will be in such style as that gentleman yonder."

He pointed as he spoke, and there was a high crimson curricle coming down the London road, with two bay mares harnessed tandem fashion before it. The reins and fittings were of a light fawn colour, and the gentleman had a driving-coat to match, with a servant in dark livery behind. They flashed past us in a rolling cloud of dust, and I had just a glimpse of the pale, handsome face of the master, and of the dark, shrivelled features of the man. I should never have given them another thought had it not chanced that when the village came into view there was the curricle again, standing at the door of the inn, and the grooms busy taking out the horses.

"Jim," I cried, "I believe it is my uncle!" and taking to my heels I ran for home at the top of my speed. At the door was standing the dark-faced servant. He carried a cushion, upon which lay a small and fluffy lapdog.

"You will excuse me, young sir," said he, in the suavest, most soothing of voices, "but am I right in supposing that this is the house of Lieutenant Stone? In that case you will, perhaps, do me the favour to hand to Mrs. Stone this note which her brother, Sir Charles Tregellis, has just committed to my care."

I was quite abashed by the man's flowery way of talking—so unlike anything which I had ever heard. He had a wizened face, and sharp little dark eyes, which took in me and the house and my mother's startled face at the

window all in the instant. My parents were together, the two of them, in the sitting-room, and my mother read the note to us.

"My dear Mary," it ran, "I have stopped at the inn, because I am somewhat *ravagé* by the dust of your Sussex roads. A lavender-water bath may restore me to a condition in which I may fitly pay my compliments to a lady. Meantime, I send you Fidelio as a hostage. Pray give him a half-pint of warmish milk with six drops of pure brandy in it. A better or more faithful creature never lived. *Toujours à toi.*—Charles."

"Have him in! Have him in!" cried my father, heartily, running to the door. "Come in, Mr. Fidelio. Every man to his own taste, and six drops to the half-pint seems a sinful watering of grog—but if you like it so, you shall have it."

A smile flickered over the dark face of the servant, but his features reset themselves instantly into their usual mask of respectful observance.

"You are labouring under a slight error, sir, if you will permit me to say so. My name is Ambrose, and I have the honour to be the valet of Sir Charles Tregellis. This is Fidelio upon the cushion."

"Tut, the dog!" cried my father, in disgust. "Heave him down by the fireside. Why should he have brandy, when many a Christian has to go without?"

"Hush, Anson!" said my mother, taking the cushion. "You will tell Sir Charles that his wishes shall be carried out, and that we shall expect him at his own convenience."

The man went off noiselessly and swiftly, but was back in a few minutes with a flat brown basket

"It is the refection, madam," said he. "Will you permit me to lay the table? Sir Charles is accustomed to partake of certain dishes and to drink certain wines, so that we usually bring them with us when we visit." He opened the basket, and in a minute he had the table all shining with silver and glass, and studded with dainty

dishes. So quick and neat and silent was he in all he did, that my father was as taken with him as I was.

"You'd have made a right good foretopman if your heart is as stout as your fingers are quick," said he. "Did you never wish to have the honour of serving your country?"

"It is my honour, sir, to serve Sir Charles Tregellis, and I desire no other master," he answered. "But I will convey his dressing-case from the inn, and then all will be ready."

He came back with a great silver-mounted box under his arms, and close at his heels was the gentleman whose coming had made such a disturbance.

My first impression of my uncle as he entered the room was that one of his eyes was swollen to the size of an apple. It caught the breath from my lips—that monstrous, glistening eye. But the next instant I perceived that he held a round glass in the front of it, which magnified it in this fashion. He looked at us each in turn, and then he bowed very gracefully to my mother, and kissed her upon either cheek.

"You will permit me to compliment you, my dear Mary," said he, in a voice which was the most mellow and beautiful that I have ever heard. "I can assure you that the country air has used you wondrous well, and that I shall be proud to see my pretty sister in the Mall. I am your servant, sir," he continued, holding out his hand to my father. "It was but last week that I had the honour of dining with my friend, Lord St. Vincent, and I took occasion to mention you to him. I may tell you that your name is not forgotten at the Admiralty, sir, and I hope that I may see you soon walking the poop of a 74-gun ship of your own. So this is my nephew, is it?" He put a hand upon each of my shoulders in a very friendly way and looked me up and down.

"How old are you, nephew?" he asked.

"Seventeen, sir."

"You look older. You look eighteen, at the least.

I find him very passable, Mary—very passable, indeed. He has not the *bel* air, the *tournure*—in our uncouth English we have no word for it. But he is as healthy as a May-hedge in bloom."

So within a minute of his entering our door he had got himself upon terms with all of us, and with so easy and graceful a manner that it seemed as if he had known us all for years. I had a good look at him now as he stood upon the hearthrug, with my mother upon one side and my father on the other. He was a very large man, with noble shoulders, small waist, broad hips, well-turned legs, and the smallest of hands and feet. His face was pale and handsome, with a prominent chin, a jutting nose, and large blue staring eyes, in which a sort of dancing, mischievous light was for ever playing. He wore a deep brown coat with a collar as high as his ears and tails as low as his knees. His black breeches and silk stockings ended in very small pointed shoes, so highly polished that they twinkled with every movement. His vest was of black velvet, open at the top to show an embroidered shirt-front, with a high, smooth, white cravat above it, which kept his neck for ever on the stretch. He stood easily, with one thumb in the arm-pit, and two fingers of the other hand in his vest pocket. It made me proud as I watched him to think that so magnificent a man, with such easy, masterful ways, should be my own blood relation, and I could see from my mother's eyes as they turned towards him that the same thought was in her mind.

All this time Ambrose had been standing like a dark-clothed, bronze-faced image by the door, with the big silver-bound box under his arm. He stepped forward now into the room.

"Shall I convey it to your bedchamber, Sir Charles?" he asked.

"Ah, pardon me, sister Mary," cried my uncle, "I am old-fashioned enough to have principles—an anachronism, you know, in this lax age. One of them is never to allow my *batterie de toilette* out of my sight when I am travelling.

I cannot readily forget the agonies which I endured some years ago through neglecting this precaution. I will do Ambrose the justice to say that it was before he took charge of my affairs. I was compelled to wear the same ruffles upon two consecutive days. On the third morning my fellow was so affected by the sight of my condition, that he burst into tears and laid out a pair which he had stolen from me."

As he spoke his face was very grave, but the light in his eyes danced and gleamed. He handed his open snuff-box to my father, as Ambrose followed my mother out of the room.

"You number yourself in an illustrious company by dipping your finger and thumb into it," said he.

"Indeed, sir!" said my father, shortly.

"You are free of my box, as being a relative by marriage. You are free also, nephew, and I pray you to take a pinch. It is the most intimate sign of my goodwill. Outside ourselves there are four, I think, who have had access to it—the Prince, of course; Mr. Pitt; Monsieur Otto, the French Ambassador; and Lord Hawkesbury. I have sometimes thought that I was premature with Lord Hawkesbury."

"I am vastly honoured, sir," said my father, looking suspiciously at his guest from under his shaggy eyebrows, for with that grave face and those twinkling eyes it was hard to know how to take him.

"A woman, sir, has her love to bestow," said my uncle. "A man has his snuff-box. Neither is to be lightly offered. It is a lapse of taste; nay, more, it is a breach of morals. Only the other day, as I was seated in Watier's, my box of prime macouba open upon the table beside me, an Irish bishop thrust in his intrusive fingers. 'Waiter,' I cried, 'my box has been soiled! Remove it!' The man meant no insult, you understand, but that class of people must be kept in their proper sphere.'

"A bishop!" cried my father. "You draw your line very high, sir."

"Yes, sir," said my uncle; "I wish no better epitaph upon my tombstone."

My mother had in the meanwhile descended, and we all drew up to the table.

"You will excuse my apparent grossness, Mary, in venturing to bring my own larder with me. Abernethy has me under his orders, and I must eschew your rich country dainties. A little white wine and a cold bird—it is as much as the niggardly Scotchman will allow me."

"We should have you on blockading service when the levanters are blowing," said my father. "Salt junk and weevilly biscuits, with a rib of a tough Barbary ox when the tenders come in. You would have your spare diet there, sir."

Straightway my uncle began to question him about the sea service, and for the whole meal my father was telling him of the Nile and of the Toulon blockade, and the siege of Genoa, and all that he had seen and done. But whenever he faltered for a word, my uncle always had it ready for him, and it was hard to say which knew most about the business.

"No, I read little or nothing," said he, when my father marvelled where he got his knowledge. "The fact is that I can hardly pick up a print without seeing some allusion to myself: 'Sir C. T. does this,' or 'Sir C. T. says the other,' so I take them no longer. But if a man is in my position all knowledge comes to him. The Duke of York tells me of the Army in the morning, and Lord Spencer chats with me of the Navy in the afternoon, and Dundas whispers me what is going forward in the Cabinet, so that I have little need of the *Times* or the *Morning Chronicle*."

This set him talking of the great world of London, telling my father about the men who were his masters at the Admiralty, and my mother about the beauties of the town, and the great ladies at Almack's, but all in the same light, fanciful way, so that one never knew whether to laugh or to take him gravely. I think it flattered him to

see the way in which we all three hung upon his words Of some he thought highly and of some lowly, but he made no secret that the highest of all, and the one against whom all others should be measured, was Sir Charles Tregellis himself.

"As to the King," said he, "of course, I am *l'ami de famille* there; and even with you I can scarce speak freely, as my relations are confidential."

"God bless him and keep him from ill!" cried my father.

"It is pleasant to hear you say so," said my uncle "One has to come into the country to hear honest loyalty for a sneer and a gibe are more the fashions in town. The King is grateful to me for the interest which I have ever shown in his son. He likes to think that the Prince has a man of taste in his circle."

"And the Prince?" asked my mother. "Is he well-favoured?"

"He is a fine figure of a man. At a distance he has been [redacted]n for me. And he has some taste in dress though he [redacted]ovenly if I am too long away from him I warrant you that I find a crease in his coat to-morrow."

We were all seated round the fire by this time, for the evening had turned chilly. The lamp was lighted, and so also was my father's pipe.

"I suppose," said he, "that this is your first visit to Friar's Oak?"

My uncle's face turned suddenly very grave and stern.

"It is my first visit for many years," said he. "I was but one-and-twenty years of age when last I came here. I am not likely to forget it."

I knew that he spoke of his visit to Cliffe Royal at the time of the murder, and I saw by her face that my mother knew it also. My father, however, had either never heard of it, or had forgotten the circumstance.

"Was it at the inn you stayed?" he asked.

"I stayed with the unfortunate Lord Avon. It was

the occasion when he was accused of slaying his younger brother and fled from the country."

We all fell silent, and my uncle leaned his chin upon his hand, looking thoughtfully into the fire. If I do but close my eyes now, I can see the light upon his proud, handsome face, and see also my dear father, concerned at having touched upon so terrible a memory, shooting little slanting glances at him betwixt the puffs of his pipe.

"I dare say that it has happened with you, sir," said my uncle at last, "that you have lost some dear messmate in battle or wreck, and that you have put him out of your mind in the routine of your daily life, until suddenly some word or some scene brings him back to your memory, and you find your sorrow as raw as upon the first day of your loss."

My father nodded.

"So it is with me to-night. I never formed a close friendship with a man—I say nothing of women—save only the once. That was with Lord Avon. We were of an age, he a few years perhaps my senior, but our tastes, our judgments and our characters were alike, save only that he had in him a touch of pride such as I have never known in any other man. Putting aside the little foibles of a rich young man of fashion, *les indiscrétions d'une jeunesse dorée*, I could have sworn that he was as good a man as I have ever known."

"How came he, then, to such a crime?" asked my father.

My uncle shook his head.

"Many a time have I asked myself that question, and it comes home to me more to-night then ever."

All the jauntiness had gone out of his manner, and he had turned suddenly into a sad and serious man.

"Was it certain that he did it, Charles?" asked my mother.

My uncle shrugged his shoulders.

"I wish I could think it were not so. I have thought sometimes that it was this very pride, turning suddenly

to madness, which drove him to it. You have heard how he returned the money which we had lost ? "

" Nay, I have heard nothing of it," my father answered.

" It is a very old story now, though we have not yet found an end to it. We had played for two days, the four of us : Lord Avon, his brother, Captain Barrington, Sir Lothian Hume and myself. Of the Captain I knew little, save that he was not of the best repute, and was deep in the hands of the Jews. Sir Lothian has made an evil name for himself since—'tis the same Sir Lothian who shot Lord Carton in the affair at Chalk Farm—but in those days there was nothing against him. The oldest of us was but twenty-four, and we gamed on, as I say, until the Captain had cleared the board. We were all hit, but our host far the hardest.

" That night—I tell you now what it would be a bitter thing for me to tell in a court of law—I was restless and sleepless, as often happens when a man has kept awake over long. My mind would dwell upon the fall of the cards, and I was tossing and turning in my bed, when suddenly a cry fell upon my ears, and then a second louder one, coming from the direction of Captain Barrington's room. Five minutes later I heard steps passing down the passage, and, without striking a light, I opened my door and peeped out, thinking that someone was taken unwell. There was Lord Avon walking towards me. In one hand he held a guttering candle and in the other a brown bag, which chinked as he moved. His face was all drawn and distorted—so much so that my question was frozen upon my lips. Before I could utter it he turned into his chamber and softly closed the door.

" Next morning I was awakened by finding him at my bedside.

" ' Charles,' said he, ' I cannot abide to think that you should have lost this money in my house. You will find it here upon your table.'

" It was in vain that I laughed at his squeamishness,

telling him that I should most certainly have claimed my money had I won, so that it would be strange indeed if I were not permitted to pay it when I lost.

" ' Neither I nor my brother will touch it,' said he. ' There it lies, and you may do what you like about it.'

" He would listen to no argument, but dashed out of the room like a madman. But perhaps these details are familiar to you, and God knows they are painful to me to tell."

My father was sitting with staring eyes, and his forgotten pipe reeking in his hand.

" Pray let us hear the end of it, sir," he cried.

" Well, then, I had finished my toilet in an hour or so—for I was less exigeant in those days than now—and I met Sir Lothian Hume at breakfast. His experience had been the same as my own, and he was eager to see Captain Barrington, and to ascertain why he had directed his brother to return the money to us. We were talking the matter over when suddenly I raised my eyes to the corner of the ceiling, and I saw—I saw——"

My uncle had turned quite pale with the vividness of the memory, and he passed his hand over his eyes.

" It was crimson," said he, with a shudder—" crimson with black cracks, and from every crack—but I will give you dreams, sister Mary. Suffice it that we rushed up the stair which led direct to the Captain's room, and there we found him lying with the bone gleaming white through his throat. A hunting-knife lay in the room—and the knife was Lord Avon's. A lace ruffle was found in the dead man's grasp—and the ruffle was Lord Avon's. Some papers were found charred in the grate—and the papers were Lord Avon's. Oh, my poor friend, in what moment of madness did you come to do such a deed ? "

The light had gone out of my uncle's eyes and the extravagance from his manner. His speech was clear and plain, with none of those strange London ways which had so amazed me. Here was a second uncle, a man of

heart and a man of brains, and I liked him better than the first.

"And what said Lord Avon?" cried my father.

"He said nothing. He went about like one who walks in his sleep, with horror-stricken eyes. None dared arrest him until there should be due inquiry, but when the coroner's court brought wilful murder against him, the constables came for him in full cry. But they found him fled. There was a rumour that he had been seen in Westminster in the next week, and then that he had escaped for America, but nothing more is known. It will be a bright day for Sir Lothian Hume when they can prove him dead, for he is next of kin, and till then he can touch neither title nor estate."

The telling of this grim story had cast a chill upon all of us. My uncle held out his hands towards the blaze, and I noticed that they were as white as the ruffles which fringed them.

"I know not how things are at Cliffe Royal now," said he, thoughtfully. "It was not a cheery house, even before this shadow fell upon it. A fitter stage was never set forth for such a tragedy. But seventeen years have passed, and perhaps even that horrible ceiling——"

"It still bears the stain," said I.

I know not which of the three was the more astonished, for my mother had not heard of my adventures of the night. They never took their wondering eyes off me as I told my story, and my heart swelled with pride when my uncle said that we had carried ourselves well, and that he did not think that many of our age would have stood it as stoutly.

"But as to this ghost, it must have been the creature of your own minds," said he. "Imagination plays us strange tricks, and though I have as steady a nerve as a man might wish, I cannot answer for what I might see if I were to stand under that blood-stained ceiling at midnight."

"Uncle," said I, "I saw a figure as plainly as I

see that fire, and I heard the steps as clearly as I hear the crackle of the faggots. Besides, we could not both be deceived."

"There is truth in that," said he, thoughtfully. "You saw no features, you say?"

"It was too dark."

"But only a figure?"

"The dark outline of one."

"And it retreated up the stairs?"

"Yes."

"And vanished into the wall?"

"Yes."

"What part of the wall?" cried a voice from behind us.

My mother screamed, and down came my father's pipe on to the hearthrug. I had sprung round with a catch of my breath, and there was the valet, Ambrose, his body in the shadow of the doorway, his dark face protruded into the light, and two burning eyes fixed upon mine.

"What the deuce is the meaning of this, sir?" cried my uncle.

It was strange to see the gleam and passion fade out of the man's face, and the demure mask of the valet replace it. His eyes still smouldered, but his features regained their prim composure in an instant.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Charles," said he. "I had come in to ask you if you had any orders for me, and I did not like to interrupt the young gentleman's story. I am afraid that I have been somewhat carried away by it."

"I never knew you forget yourself before," said my uncle.

"You will, I am sure, forgive me, Sir Charles, if you will call to mind the relation in which I stood to Lord Avon." He spoke with some dignity of manner, and with a bow he left the room.

"We must make some little allowance," said my uncle, with a sudden return to his jaunty manner. "When a

man can brew a dish of chocolate, or tie a cravat, as Ambrose does, he may claim consideration. The fact is that the poor fellow was valet to Lord Avon, that he was at Cliffe Royal upon the fatal night of which I have spoken, and that he is most devoted to his old master. But my talk has been somewhat *triste*, sister Mary, and now we shall return, if you please, to the dresses of the Countess Lieven, and the gossip of St. James."

6. *On the Threshold*

MY father sent me to bed early that night, though I was very eager to stay up, for every word which this man said held my attention. His face, his manner, the large waves and sweeps of his white hands, his easy air of superiority, his fantastic fashion of talk, all filled me with interest and wonder. But, as I afterwards learned, their conversation was to be about myself and my own prospects, so I was despatched to my room, whence far into the night I could hear the deep growl of my father and the rich tones of my uncle, with an occasional gentle murmur from my mother, as they talked in the room beneath.

I had dropped asleep at last, when I was awakened suddenly by something wet being pressed against my face, and by two warm arms which were cast round me. My mother's cheek was against my own, and I could hear the click of her sobs, and feel her quiver and shake in the darkness. A faint light stole through the latticed window, and I could dimly see that she was in white, with her black hair loose upon her shoulders.

"You won't forget us, Roddy? You won't forget us?"

"Why, mother, what is it?"

"Your uncle, Roddy—he is going to take you away from us."

"When, mother?"

"To-morrow."

God forgive me, how my heart bounded for joy, when hers, which was within touch of it, was breaking with sorrow!

"Oh, mother!" I cried. "To London?"

"First to Brighton, that he may present you to the Prince. Next day to London, where you will meet the great people, Roddy, and learn to look down upon—to look down upon your poor, simple, old-fashioned father and mother."

I put my arms about her to console her, but she wept so that, for all my seventeen years and pride of manhood, it set me weeping also, and with such a hiccoughing noise, since I had not a woman's knack of quiet tears, that it finally turned her own grief to laughter.

"Charles would be flattered if he could see the gracious way in which we receive his kindness," said she. "Be still, Roddy dear, or you will certainly wake him."

"I'll not go if it is to grieve you," I cried.

"Nay, dear, you must go, for it may be the one great chance of your life. And think how proud it will make us all when we hear of you in the company of Charles's grand friends. But you will promise me not to gamble, Roddy? You heard to-night of the dreadful things which come from it."

"I promise you, mother."

"And you will be careful of wine, Roddy? You are young and unused to it."

"Yes, mother."

"And play-actresses also, Roddy. And you will not cast your underclothing until June is in. Young Master Overton came by his death through it. Think well of your dress, Roddy, so as to do your uncle credit, for it is the thing for which he is himself most famed. You have but to do what he will direct. But if there is a time when you are not meeting grand people, you can wear out your country things, for your brown coat is as good as new, and the blue one, if it were ironed and relined,

would take you through the summer. I have put out your Sunday clothes with the nankeen vest, since you are to see the Prince to-morrow, and you will wear your brown silk stockings and buckle shoes. Be guarded in crossing the London streets, for I am told that the hackney coaches are past all imagining. Fold your clothes when you go to bed, Roddy, and do not forget your evening prayers, for, oh, my dear boy, the days of temptation are at hand, when I will no longer be with you to help you."

So with advice and guidance both for this world and the next did my mother, with her soft, warm arms around me, prepare me for the great step which lay before me.

My uncle did not appear at breakfast in the morning, but Ambrose brewed him a dish of chocolate and took it to his room. When at last, about midday, he did descend, he was so fine with his curled hair, his shining teeth, his quizzing glass, his snow-white ruffles and his laughing eyes, that I could not take my gaze from him.

"Well, nephew," he cried, "what do you think of the prospect of coming to town with me?"

"I thank you, sir, for the kind interest which you take in me," said I.

"But you must be a credit to me. My nephew must be of the best if he is to be in keeping with the rest of me."

"You'll find him a chip of good wood, sir," said my father.

"We must make him a polished chip before we have done with him. Your aim, my dear nephew, must always be to be in *bon ton*. It is not a case of wealth, you understand. Mere riches cannot do it. Golden Price has forty thousand a year, but his clothes are disastrous. I assure you that I saw him come down St. James's Street the other day, and I was so shocked at his appearance that I had to step into Vernet's for a glass of orange brandy. No, it is a question of natural taste, and of

following the advice and example of those who are more experienced than yourself."

"I fear, Charles, that Roddy's wardrobe is country-made," said my mother.

"We shall soon set that right when we get to town. We shall see what Stultz or Weston can do for him," my uncle answered. "We must keep him quiet until he has some clothes to wear."

This slight upon my best Sunday suit brought a flush to my mother's cheeks, which my uncle instantly observed, for he was quick in noticing trifles.

"The clothes are very well for Friar's Oak, sister Mary," said he. "And yet you can understand that they might seem *rococo* in the Mall. If you leave him in my hands I shall see to the matter."

"On how much, sir," asked my father, "can a young man dress in town?"

"With prudence and reasonable care, a young man of fashion can dress upon eight hundred a year," my uncle answered.

I saw my poor father's face grow longer.

"I fear, sir, that Roddy must keep his country clothes," said he. "Even with my prize-money——"

"Tut, sir!" cried my uncle. "I already owe Weston something over a thousand, so how can a few odd hundreds affect it? If my nephew comes with me, my nephew is my care. The point is settled, and I must refuse to argue upon it." He waved his white hands as if to brush aside all opposition.

My parents tried to thank him, but he cut them short.

"By the way, now that I am in Friar's Oak, there is another small piece of business which I have to perform," said he. "I believe that there is a fighting-man named Harrison here, who at one time might have held the championship. In those days poor Avon and I were his principal backers. I should like to have a word with him."

You may think how proud I was to walk down the

village street with my magnificent relative, and to note out of the corner of my eye how the folk came to the doors and windows to see us pass. Champion Harrison was standing outside the smithy, and he pulled his cap off when he saw my uncle.

"God bless me, sir! Who'd ha' thought of seein' you at Friar's Oak? Why, Sir Charles, it brings old memories back to look at your face again."

"Glad to see you looking so fit, Harrison," said my uncle, running his eyes over him. "Why, with a week's training you would be as good a man as ever. I don't suppose you scale more than thirteen and a half?"

"Thirteen ten, Sir Charles. I'm in my fortieth year, but I am sound in wind and limb, and if my old woman would have let me off my promise, I'd ha' had a try with some of these young ones before now. I hear that they've got some amazin' good stuff up from Bristol of late."

"Yes, the Bristol yellowman has been the winning colour of late. How d'ye do, Mrs. Harrison? I don't suppose you remember me?"

She had come out from the house, and I noticed that her worn face—on which some past terror seemed to have left its shadow—hardened into stern lines as she looked at my uncle.

"I remember you too well, Sir Charles Tregellis," said she. "I trust that you have not come here to-day to try to draw my husband back into the ways that he has forsaken."

"That's the way with her, Sir Charles," said Harrison, resting his great hand upon the woman's shoulder. "She's got my promise, and she holds me to it! There was never a better or more hard-working wife, but she ain't what you'd call a patron of sport, and that's a fact."

"Sport!" cried the woman, bitterly. "A fine sport for you, Sir Charles, with your pleasant twenty-mile drive into the country and your luncheon-basket and your wines, and so merrily back to London in the cool of the

evening, with a well-fought battle to talk over. Think of the sport that it was to me to sit through the long hours, listening for the wheels of the chaise which would bring my man back to me. Sometimes he could walk in, and sometimes he was led in, and sometimes he was carried in, and it was only by his clothes that I could know him——"

"Come, wifie," said Harrison, patting her on the shoulder. "I've been cut up in my time, but never as bad as that."

"And then to live for weeks afterwards with the fear that every knock at the door may be to tell us that the other is dead, and that my man may have to stand in the dock and take his trial for murder."

"No, she hasn't got a sportin' drop in her veins," said Harrison. "She'd never make a patron, never! It's Black Baruk's business that did it, when we thought he'd napped it once too often. Well, she has my promise, and I'll never sling my hat over the ropes unless she gives me leave."

"You'll keep your hat on your head like an honest, God-fearing man, John," said his wife, turning back into the house.

"I wouldn't for the world say anything to make you change your resolutions," said my uncle. "At the same time, if you had wished to take a turn at the old sport, I had a good thing to put in your way."

"Well, it's no use, sir," said Harrison, "but I'd be glad to hear about it all the same."

"They have a very good bit of stuff at thirteen stone down Gloucester way. Wilson is his name, and they call him Crab on account of his style."

Harrison shook his head. "Never heard of him, sir."

"Very likely not, for he has never shown in the P.R. But they think great things of him in the West, and he can hold his own with either of the Belchers with the mufflers."

"Sparrin' ain't fightin'," said the smith.

"I am told that he had the best of it in a by-battle with Noah James, of Cheshire."

"There's no gamer man on the list, sir, than Noah James, the guardsman," said Harrison. "I saw him myself fight fifty rounds after his jaw had been cracked in three places. If Wilson could beat him, Wilson will go far."

"So they think in the West, and they mean to spring him on the London talent. Sir Lothian Hume is his patron, and to make a long story short, he lays me odds that I won't find a young one of his weight to meet him. I told him that I had not heard of any good young ones, but that I had an old one who had not put his foot into a ring for many years, who would make his man wish he had never come to London.

"'Young or old, under twenty or over thirty-five, you may bring whom you will at the weight, and I shall lay two to one on Wilson,' said he. I took him in thousands, and here I am."

"It won't do, Sir Charles," said the smith, shaking his head. "There's nothing would please me better, but you heard for yourself."

"Well, if you won't fight, Harrison, I must try to get some promising colt. I'd be glad of your advice in the matter. By the way, I take the chair at a supper of the Fancy at the Waggon and Horses in St. Martin's Lane next Friday. I should be very glad if you will make one of my guests. Halloa, who's this?" Up flew his glass to his eye.

Boy Jim had come out from the forge with his hammer in his hand. He had, I remember, a grey flannel shirt, which was open at the neck, and turned up at at the sleeves. My uncle ran his eyes over the fine lines of his magnificent figure with the glance of a connoisseur.

"That's my nephew, Sir Charles."

"Is he living with you?"

"His parents are dead."

"Has he ever been in London?"

"No, Sir Charles. He's been with me here since he was as high as that hammer."

My uncle turned to Boy Jim.

"I hear that you have never been in London," said he. "Your uncle is coming up to a supper which I am giving to the Fancy next Friday. Would you care to make one of us?"

Boy Jim's dark eyes sparkled with pleasure.

"I should be glad to come, sir."

"No, no, Jim," cried the smith, abruptly. "I'm sorry to gainsay you, lad, but there are reasons why I had rather you stayed down here with your aunt."

"Tut, Harrison, let the lad come!" cried my uncle.

"No, no, Sir Charles. It's dangerous company for a lad of his mettle. There's plenty for him to do when I'm away."

Poor Jim turned away with a clouded brow and strode into the smithy again. For my part, I slipped after him to try to console him, and to tell him all the wonderful changes which had come so suddenly into my life. But I had not got half through my story, and Jim, like the good fellow that he was, had just begun to forget his own troubles in his delight at my good fortune, when my uncle called to me from without. The curricle with its tandem mares was waiting for us outside the cottage, and Ambrose had placed the refection-basket, the lapdog and the precious toilet-box inside of it. He had himself climbed up behind, and I, after a hearty handshake from my father, and a last sobbing embrace from my mother, took my place beside my uncle in the front.

"Let go her head!" cried he to the ostler, and with a snap, a crack and a jingle, away we went upon our journey.

Across all the years how clearly I can see that spring day, with the green English fields, the windy English sky, and the yellow, beetle-browed cottage in which I had grown from a child to a man. I see, too, the figures at the garden gate: my mother, with her face turned

away and her handkerchief waving ; my father, with his blue coat and his white shorts, leaning upon his stick with his hand shading his eyes as he peered after us. All the village was out to see young Roddy Stone go off with his grand relative from London to call upon the Prince in his own palace. The Harrisons were waving to me from the smithy, and John Cummings from the steps of the inn, and I saw Joshua Allen, my old schoolmaster, pointing me out to the people as if he were showing what came from his teaching. To make it complete, who should drive past just as we cleared the village but Miss Hinton, the play-actress, the pony and phaeton the same as when first I saw her, but she herself another woman ; and I thought to myself that if Boy Jim had done nothing but that one thing, he need not think that his youth had been wasted in the country. She was driving to see him, I have no doubt, for they were closer than ever, and she never looked up nor saw the hand that I waved to her. So as we took the curve of the road the little village vanished, and there in the dip of the Downs, past the spires of Patcham and of Preston, lay the broad blue sea and the grey houses of Brighton, with the strange Eastern domes and minarets of the Prince's Pavilion shooting out from the centre of it.

To every traveller it was a sight of beauty, but to me it was the world—the great wide free world—and my heart thrilled and fluttered as the young bird's may when it first hears the whirr of its own flight, and skims along with the blue heaven above it and the green fields beneath. The day may come when it may look back regretfully to the snug nest in the thorn-bush, but what does it reck of that when spring is in the air and youth in its blood, and the old hawk of trouble has not yet darkened the sunshine with the ill-boding shadow of its wings ?

7. *The Hope of England*

MY uncle drove for some time in silence, but I was conscious that his eye was always coming round to me, and I had an uneasy conviction that he was already beginning to ask himself whether he could make anything of me, or whether he had been betrayed into an indiscretion when he had allowed his sister to persuade him to show her son something of the grand world in which he lived.

"You sing, don't you, nephew?" he asked, suddenly.

"Yes, sir, a little."

"A baritone, I should fancy?"

"Yes, sir."

"And your mother tells me that you play the fiddle. These things will be of service to you with the Prince. Music runs in his family. Your education has been what you could get at a village school. Well, you are not examined in Greek roots in polite society, which is lucky for some of us. It is as well just to have a tag or two of Horace or Virgil: 'sub tegmine fagi,' or 'habet fœnum in cornu,' which gives a flavour to one's conversation like the touch of garlic in a salad. It is not *bon ton* to be learned, but it is a graceful thing to indicate that you have forgotten a good deal. Can you write verse?"

"I fear not, sir."

"A small book of rhymes may be had for half a crown. Vers de Société are a great assistance to a young man. If you have the ladies on your side, it does not matter whom you have against you. You must learn to open a door, to enter a room, to present a snuff-box, raising the lid with the forefinger of the hand in which you hold it. You must acquire the bow for a man, with its necessary touch of dignity, and that for a lady, which cannot be too humble, and should still contain the least suspicion of abandon. You must cultivate a manner with women which shall be deprecating and yet audacious. Have you any eccentricity?"

It made me laugh, the easy way in which he asked the question, as if it were a most natural thing to possess.

"You have a pleasant, catching laugh, at all events," said he. "But an eccentricity is very *bon ton* at present, and if you feel any leaning towards one, I should certainly advise you to let it run its course. Petersham would have remained a mere peer all his life had it not come out that he had a snuff-box for every day in the year, and that he had caught cold through a mistake of his valet, who sent him out on a bitter winter day with a thin Sèvres china box instead of a thick tortoise-shell. That brought him out of the ruck, you see, and people remember him. Even some small characteristic, such as having an apricot tart on your sideboard all the year round, or putting your candle out at night by stuffing it under your pillow, serves to separate you from your neighbour. In my own case, it is my precise judgment upon matters of dress and decorum which has placed me where I am. I do not profess to follow a law. I set one. For example, I am taking you to-day to see the Prince in a nankeen vest. What do you think will be the consequence of that?"

My fears told me that it might be my own very great discomfiture, but I did not say so.

"Why, the night coach will carry the news to London. It will be in Brookes's and White's to-morrow morning. Within a week St. James's Street and the Mall will be full of nankeen waistcoats. A most painful incident happened to me once. My cravat came undone in the street, and I actually walked from Carlton House to Watier's in Bruton Street with the two ends hanging loose. Do you suppose it shook my position? The same evening there were dozens of young bloods walking the streets of London with their cravats loose. If I had not rearranged mine there would not be one tied in the whole kingdom now, and a great art would have been prematurely lost. You have not yet begun to practise it?"

I confessed that I had not.

"You should begin now in your youth. I will myself teach you the *coup d'archet*. By using a few hours in each day, which would otherwise be wasted, you may hope to have excellent cravats in middle life. The whole knack lies in pointing your chin to the sky, and then arranging your folds by the gradual descent of your lower jaw."

When my uncle spoke like this there was always that dancing, mischievous light in his dark blue eyes, which showed me that this humour of his was a conscious eccentricity, depending, as I believe, upon a natural fastidiousness of taste, but wilfully driven to grotesque lengths for the very reason which made him recommend me also to develop some peculiarity of my own. When I thought of the way in which he had spoken of his unhappy friend, Lord Avon, upon the evening before, and of the emotion which he showed as he told the horrible story, I was glad to think that there was the heart of a man there, however much it might please him to conceal it.

And, as it happened, I was very soon to have another peep at it, for a most unexpected event befell us as we drew up in front of the Crown Hotel. A swarm of ostlers and grooms had rushed out to us, and my uncle, throwing down the reins, gathered Fidelio on his cushion from under the seat.

"Ambrose," he cried, "you may take Fidelio."

But there came no answer. The seat behind was unoccupied. Ambrose was gone.

We could hardly believe our eyes when we alighted and found that it was really so. He had most certainly taken his seat there at Friar's Oak, and from there on we had come without a break as fast as the mares could travel. Whither, then, could he have vanished to?

"He's fallen off in a fit!" cried my uncle. "I'd drive back, but the Prince is expecting us. Where's the landlord? Here, Coppinger, send your best man back to Friar's Oak, as fast as his horse can go, to find news of my valet, Ambrose. See that no pains be spared.

Now, nephew, we shall lunch, and then go up to the Pavilion."

My uncle was much disturbed by the strange loss of his valet, the more so as it was his custom to go through a whole series of washings and changings after even the shortest journey. For my own part, mindful of my mother's advice, I carefully brushed the dust from my clothes and made myself as neat as possible. My heart was down in the soles of my little silver-buckled shoes now that I had the immediate prospect of meeting so great and terrible a person as the Prince of Wales. I had seen his flaring yellow barouche flying through Friar's Oak many a time, and had halloaed and waved my hat with the others as it passed, but never in my wildest dreams had it entered my head that I should ever be called upon to look him in the face and answer his questions. My mother had taught me to regard him with reverence, as one of those whom God had placed to rule over us; but my uncle smiled when I told him of her teaching.

"You are old enough to see things as they are, nephew," said he, "and your knowledge of them is the badge that you are in that inner circle where I mean to place you. There is no one who knows the Prince better than I do, and there is no one who trusts him less. A stranger contradiction of qualities was never gathered under one hat. He is a man who is always in a hurry, and yet has never anything to do. He fusses about things with which he has no concern, and he neglects every obvious duty. He is generous to those who have no claim upon him, but he has ruined his tradesmen by refusing to pay his just debts. He is affectionate to casual acquaintances, but he dislikes his father, loathes his mother and is not on speaking terms with his wife. He claims to be the first gentleman of England, but the gentlemen of England have responded by blackballing his friends at their clubs, and by warning him off from Newmarket under suspicion of having tampered with a horse. He spends his day in

uttering noble sentiments, and contradicting them by ignoble actions. He tells stories of his own doings which are so grotesque that they can only be explained by the madness which runs in his blood. And yet, with all this, he can be courteous, dignified and kindly upon occasion, and I have seen an impulsive good-heartedness in the man which has made me overlook faults which come mainly from his being placed in a position which no one upon this earth was ever less fitted to fill. But this is between ourselves, nephew; and now you will come with me and you will form an opinion for yourself."

It was but a short walk, and yet it took us some time, for my uncle stalked along with great dignity, his lace-bordered handkerchief in one hand, and his cane with the clouded amber head dangling from the other. Every one that we met seemed to know him, and their hats flew from their heads as we passed. He took little notice of these greetings, save to give a nod to one, or to slightly raise his forefinger to another. It chanced, however, that as we turned into the Pavilion Grounds, we met a magnificent team of four coal-black horses, driven by a rough-looking, middle-aged fellow in an old weather-stained cape. There was nothing that I could see to distinguish him from any professional driver, save that he was chatting very freely with a dainty little woman who was perched on the box beside him.

"Halloa, Charlie! Good drive down?" he cried.

My uncle bowed and smiled to the lady.

"Broke it at Friar's Oak," said he. "I've my light curricle and two new mares—half thoroughbred, half Cleveland bay."

"What d'you think of my team of blacks?" asked the other.

"Yes, Sir Charles, what d'you think of them? Ain't they damnation smart?" cried the little woman.

"Plenty of power. Good horses for the Sussex clay. Too thick about the fetlocks for me. I like to travel."

"Travel!" cried the woman, with extraordinary

vehemence. "Why, what the——" and she broke into such language as I had never heard from a man's lips before. "We'd start with our swingle-bars touching, and we'd have your dinner ordered, cooked, laid and eaten before you were there to claim it."

"By George, yes, Letty is right!" cried the man. "D'you start to-morrow?"

"Yes, Jack."

"Well, I'll make you an offer. Look ye here, Charlie! I'll spring my cattle from the Castle Square at quarter before nine. You can follow as the clock strikes. I've double the horses and double the weight. If you so much as see me before we cross Westminster Bridge, I'll pay you a cool hundred. If not, it's my money—play or pay. Is it a match?"

"Very good," said my uncle, and, raising his hat, he led the way into the grounds. As I followed, I saw the woman take the reins, while the man looked after us, and squirted a jet of tobacco-juice from between his teeth in coachman fashion.

"That's Sir John Lade," said my uncle, "one of the richest men and best whips in England. There isn't a professional on the road that can handle either his tongue or his ribbons better; but his wife, Lady Letty, is his match with the one or the other."

"It was dreadful to hear her," said I.

"Oh, it's her eccentricity. We all have them; and she amuses the Prince. Now, nephew, keep close at my elbow, and have your eyes open and your mouth shut."

Two lines of magnificent red and gold footmen who guarded the door bowed deeply as my uncle and I passed between them, he with his head in the air and a manner as if he entered into his own, whilst I tried to look assured, though my heart was beating thin and fast. Within there was a high and large hall, ornamented with Eastern decorations, which harmonised with the domes and minarets of the exterior. A number of people were moving quietly about, forming into groups and whispering to

each other. One of these, a short, burly, red-faced man, full of fuss and self-importance, came hurrying up to my uncle.

"I have de goot news, Sir Charles," said he, sinking his voice as one who speaks of weighty measures. "*Es ist vollendet*—dat is, I have it at last thoroughly done."

"Well, serve it hot," said my uncle, coldly, "and see that the sauces are a little better than when last I dined at Carlton House."

"Ah, mine Gott, you tink I talk of de cuisine. It is de affair of de Prince dat I speak of. Dat is one little *vol-au-vent* dat is worth one hundred tousand pound. Ten per cent. and double to be repaid when de Royal pappa die. *Alles ist fertig*. Goldshmidt of de Hague have took it up, and de Dutch public has subscribe de money."

"God help the Dutch public!" muttered my uncle, as the fat little man bustled off with his news to some newcomer. "That's the Prince's famous cook, nephew. He has not his equal in England for a *filet sauté aux champignons*. He manages his master's money affairs."

"The cook!" I exclaimed, in bewilderment.

"You look surprised, nephew."

"I should have thought that some respectable banking firm——"

My uncle inclined his lips to my ear.

"No respectable house would touch them," he whispered. "Ah, Mellish, is the Prince within?"

"In the private saloon, Sir Charles," said the gentleman addressed.

"Anyone with him?"

"Sheridan and Francis. He said he expected you."

"Then we shall go through."

I followed him through the strangest succession of rooms, full of curious barbaric splendour which impressed me as being very rich and wonderful, though perhaps I hsould think differently now. Gold and scarlet in arabesque designs gleamed upon the walls, with gilt

dragons and monsters writhing along cornices and out of corners. Look where I would, on panel or ceiling, a score of mirrors flashed back the picture of the tall, proud, white-faced man, and the youth who walked so demurely at his elbow. Finally, a footman opened a door, and we found ourselves in the Prince's own private apartment.

Two gentlemen were lounging in a very easy fashion upon luxurious fauteuils at the further end of the room, and a third stood between them, his thick, well-formed legs somewhat apart and his hands clasped behind him. The sun was shining in upon them through a side-window, and I can see the three faces now—one in the dusk, one in the light, and one cut across by the shadow. Of those at the sides, I recall the reddish nose and dark, flashing eyes of the one, and the hard, austere face of the other, with the high coat-collars and many-wreathed cravats. These I took in at a glance, but it was upon the man in the centre that my gaze was fixed, for this I knew must be the Prince of Wales.

George was then in his forty-first year, and with the help of his tailor and his hairdresser, he might have passed as somewhat less. The sight of him put me at my ease, for he was a merry-looking man, handsome too in a portly, full-blooded way, with laughing eyes and pouting, sensitive lips. His nose was turned upwards, which increased the good-humoured effect of his countenance at the expense of its dignity. His cheeks were pale and sodden, like those of a man who lived too well and took too little exercise. He was dressed in a single-breasted black coat buttoned up, a pair of leather pantaloons stretched tightly across his broad thighs, polished Hessian boots, and a huge white neckcloth.

"Halloa, Tregellis!" he cried, in the cheeriest fashion, as my uncle crossed the threshold, and then suddenly the smile faded from his face, and his eyes gleamed with resentment. "What the deuce is this?" he shouted, angrily.

A thrill of fear passed through me as I thought that it was my appearance which had produced this outburst. But his eyes were gazing past us, and glancing round we saw that a man in a brown coat and scratch wig had followed so closely at our heels, that the footmen had let him pass under the impression that he was of our party. His face was very red, and the folded blue paper which he carried in his hand shook and crackled in his excitement.

"Why, it's Vuillamy, the furniture man," cried the Prince. "What, am I to be dunned in my own private room? Where's Mellish? Where's Townshend? What the deuce is Tom Tring doing?"

"I wouldn't have intruded, your Royal Highness, but I must have the money—or even a thousand on account would do."

"Must have it, must you, Vuillamy? That's a fine word to use. I pay my debts in my own time, and I'm not to be bullied. Turn him out, footman! Take him away!"

"If I don't get it by Monday, I shall be in your papa's Bench," wailed the little man, and as the footman led him out we could hear him, amidst shouts of laughter, still protesting that he would wind up in "papa's Bench."

"That's the very place for a furniture man," said the man with the red nose.

"It should be the longest bench in the world, Sherry," answered the Prince, "for a good many of his subjects will want seats on it. Very glad to see you back, Tregellis, but you must really be more careful what you bring in upon your skirts. It was only yesterday that we had an infernal Dutchman here howling about some arrears of interest and the deuce knows what. 'My good fellow,' said I, 'as long as the Commons starve me, I have to starve you,' and so the matter ended."

"I think, sir, that the Commons would respond now if the matter were fairly put before them by Charlie Fox or myself," said Sheridan.

The Prince burst out against the Commons with an energy of hatred that one would scarce expect from that chubby, good-humoured face.

"Why, curse them!" he cried. "After all their preaching and throwing my father's model life, as they called it, in my teeth, they had to pay *his* debts to the tune of nearly a million, whilst I can't get a hundred thousand out of them. And look at all they've done for my brothers! York is Commander-in-Chief. Clarence is Admiral. What am I? Colonel of a damned dragoon regiment under the orders of my own younger brother. It's my mother that's at the bottom of it all. She always tried to hold me back. But what's this you've brought, Tregellis, eh?"

My uncle put his hand on my sleeve and led me forward.

"This is my sister's son, sir; Rodney Stone by name," said he. "He is coming with me to London, and I thought it right to begin by presenting him to your Royal Highness."

"Quite right! Quite right!" said the Prince, with a good-natured smile, patting me in a friendly way upon the shoulder. "Is your mother living?"

"Yes, sir," said I.

"If you are a good son to her you will never go wrong. And, mark my words, Mr. Rodney Stone, you should honour the King, love your country and uphold the glorious British Constitution."

When I thought of the energy with which he had just been cursing the House of Commons, I could scarce keep from smiling, and I saw Sheridan put his hand up to his lips.

"You have only to do this, to show a regard for your word, and to keep out of debt in order to ensure a happy and respected life. What is your father, Mr. Stone? Royal Navy! Well, it is a glorious service. I have had a touch of it myself. Did I ever tell you how we laid aboard the French sloop of war *Minerve*—hey, Tregellis?"

"No, sir," said my uncle. Sheridan and Francis exchanged glances behind the Prince's back.

"She was flying her tricolour out there within sight of my pavilion windows. Never saw such monstrous impudence in my life! It would take a man of less mettle than me to stand it. Out I went in my little cock-boat—you know my sixty-ton yawl, Charlie?—with two four-pounders on each side, and a six-pounder in the bows."

"Well, sir! Well, sir! And what then, sir?" cried Francis, who appeared to be an irascible, rough-tongued man.

"You will permit me to tell the story in my own way, Sir Philip," said the Prince, with dignity. "I was about to say that our metal was so light that I give you my word, gentlemen, that I carried my port broadside in one coat pocket, and my starboard in the other. Up we came to the big Frenchman, took her fire, and scraped the paint off her before we let drive. But it was no use. By George, gentlemen, our balls just stuck in her timbers like stones in a mud wall. She had her nettings up, but we scrambled aboard, and at it we went hammer and anvil. It was a sharp twenty minutes, but we beat her people down below, made the hatches fast on them, and towed her into Seaham. Surely you were with us, Sherry?"

"I was in London at the time," said Sheridan, gravely.

"You can vouch for it, Francis!"

"I can vouch to having heard your Highness tell the story."

"It was a rough little bit of cutlass and pistol work. But, for my own part, I like the rapier. It's a gentleman's weapon. You heard of my bout with the Chevalier d'Eon? I had him at my sword-point for forty minutes at Angelo's. He was one of the best blades in Europe, but I was a little too supple in the wrist for him. 'I thank God there was a button on your Highness's foil,' said he, when we had finished our breather. By the way,

you're a bit of a duellist yourself, Tregellis. How often have you been out?"

"I used to go when I needed exercise," said my uncle, carelessly. "But I have taken to tennis now instead. A painful incident happened the last time that I was out, and it sickened me of it."

"You killed your man——?"

"No, no, sir, it was worse than that. I had a coat that Weston has never equalled. To say that it fitted me is not to express it. It *was* me—like the hide on a horse. I've had sixty from him since, but he could never approach it. The sit of the collar brought tears into my eyes, sir, when first I saw it; and as to the waist——"

"But the duel, Tregellis!" cried the Prince.

"Well, sir, I wore it at the duel, like the thoughtless fool that I was. It was Major Hunter, of the Guards, with whom I had had a little *tracasserie*, because I hinted that he should not come into Brookes's smelling of the stables. I fired first, and missed. He fired, and I shrieked in despair. 'He's hit! A surgeon! A surgeon!' they cried. 'A tailor! A tailor!' said I, for there was a double hole through the tails of my masterpiece. No, it was past all repair. You may laugh, sir, but I'll never see the like of it again."

I had seated myself on a settee in the corner, upon the Prince's invitation, and very glad I was to remain quiet and unnoticed, listening to the talk of these men. It was all in the same extravagant vein, garnished with many senseless oaths; but I observed this difference, that, whereas my uncle and Sheridan had something of humour in their exaggeration, Francis tended always to ill-nature, and the Prince to self-glorification. Finally, the conversation turned to music—I am not sure that my uncle did not artfully bring it there, and the Prince, hearing from him of my tastes, would have it that I should then and there sit down at the wonderful little piano, all inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which stood in the corner, and play him the accompaniment to his song. It was called, as

I remember, "The Briton Conquers but to Save," and he rolled it out in a very fair bass voice, the others joining in the chorus, and clapping vigorously when he finished.

"Bravo, Mr. Stone!" said he. "You have an excellent touch; and I know what I am talking about when I speak of music. Cramer, of the Opera, said only the other day that he had rather hand his bâton to me than to any amateur in England. Halloa, it's Charlie Fox, by all that's wonderful!"

He had run forward with much warmth, and was shaking the hand of a singular-looking person who had just entered the room. The new-comer was a stout, square-built man, plainly and almost carelessly dressed, with an uncouth manner and a rolling gait. His age might have been something over fifty, and his swarthy, harshly-featured face was already deeply lined either by his years or by his excesses. I have never seen a countenance in which the angel and the devil were more obviously wedded. Above, was the high, broad forehead of the philosopher, with keen, humorous eyes looking out from under thick, strong brows. Below, was the heavy jowl of the sensualist curving in a broad crease over his cravat. That brow was the brow of the public Charles Fox, the thinker, the philanthropist, the man who rallied and led the Liberal party during the twenty most hazardous years of its existence. That jaw was the jaw of the private Charles Fox, the gambler, the libertine, the drunkard. Yet to his sins he never added the crowning one of hypocrisy. His vices were as open as his virtues. In some quaint freak of Nature, two spirits seemed to have been joined in one body, and the same frame to contain the best and the worst man of his age.

"I've run down from Chertsey, sir, just to shake you by the hand, and to make sure that the Tories have not carried you off."

"Hang it, Charlie, you know that I sink or swim with my friends! A Whig I started, and a Whig I shall remain."

I thought that I could read upon Fox's dark face that he was by no means so confident about the Prince's principles.

"Pitt has been at you, sir, I understand?"

"Yes, confound him! I hate the sight of that sharp-pointed snout of his, which he wants to be ever poking into my affairs. He and Addington have been boggling about the debts again. Why, look ye, Charlie, if Pitt held me in contempt he could not behave different."

I gathered from the smile which flitted over Sheridan's face that this was exactly what Pitt did do. But straightway they all plunged into politics, varied by the drinking of sweet maraschino, which a footman brought round upon a salver. The King, the Queen, the Lords and the Commons were each in succession cursed by the Prince, in spite of the excellent advice which he had given me about the British Constitution.

"Why, they allow me so little that I can't look after my own people. There are a dozen annuities to old servants and the like, and it's all I can do to scrape the money together to pay them. However, my"—he pulled himself up and coughed in a consequential way—"my financial agent has arranged for a loan, repayable upon the King's death. This liquor isn't good for either of us, Charlie. We're both getting monstrous stout."

"I can't get any exercise for the gout," said Fox.

"I am blooded fifty ounces a month, but the more I take the more I make. You wouldn't think, to look at us, Tregellis, that we could do what we have done. We've had some days and nights together, Charlie!"

Fox smiled and shook his head.

"You remember how we posted to Newmarket before the races. We took a public coach, Tregellis, clapped the postilions into the rumble, and jumped on to their places. Charlie rode the leader and I the wheeler. One fellow wouldn't let us through his turnpike, and Charlie hopped off, and had his coat off in a minute. The fellow

thought he had to do with a fighting man, and soon cleared the way for us."

" By the way, sir, speaking of fighting men, I give a supper to the Fancy at the Waggon and Horses on Friday next," said my uncle. " If you should chance to be in town, they would think it a great honour if you should condescend to look in upon us."

" I've not seen a fight since I saw Tom Tyne, the tailor, kill Earl fourteen years ago. I swore off then, and you know me as a man of my word, Tregellis. Of course I've been at the ringside *incog*. many a time, but never as the Prince of Wales."

" We should be vastly honoured if you would come *incog*. to our supper, sir."

" Well, well, Sherry, make a note of it. We'll be at Carlton House on Friday. The Prince can't come, you know, Tregellis, but you might reserve a chair for the Earl of Chester."

" Sir, we shall be proud to see the Earl of Chester there," said my uncle.

" By the way, Tregellis," said Fox, " there's some rumour about your having a sporting bet with Sir Lothian Hume. What's the truth of it ? "

" Only a small matter of a couple of thous. to a thou., he giving the odds. He has a fancy to this new Gloucester man, Crab Wilson, and I'm to find a man to beat him. Anything under twenty or over thirty-five, at or about thirteen stone."

" You take Charlie Fox's advice, then," cried the Prince. " When it comes to handicapping a horse, playing a hand, matching a cock or picking a man, he has the best judgment in England. Now, Charlie, whom have we upon the list who can beat Crab Wilson, of Gloucester ? "

I was amazed at the interest and knowledge which all these great people showed about the Ring, for they not only had the deeds of the principal men of the time—Belcher, Mendoza, Jackson, or Dutch Sam—at their

fingers' ends, but there was no fighting man so obscure that they did not know the details of his deeds and prospects. The old ones and then the young were discussed—their weight, their gameness, their hitting power, and their constitution. Who, as he saw Sheridan and Fox eagerly arguing as to whether Caleb Baldwin, the Westminster costermonger, could hold his own with Isaac Bittoon, the Jew, would have guessed that the one was the deepest political philosopher in Europe, and that the other would be remembered as the author of the wittiest comedy and of the finest speech of his generation?

The name of Champion Harrison came very early into the discussion, and Fox, who had a high idea of Crab Wilson's powers, was of opinion that my uncle's only chance lay in the veteran taking the field again. "He may be slow on his pins, but he fights with his head, and he hits like the kick of a horse. When he finished Black Baruk the man flew across the outer ring as well as the inner, and fell among the spectators. If he isn't absolutely stale, Tregellis, he is your best chance."

My uncle shrugged his shoulders.

"If poor Avon were here we might do something with him, for he was Harrison's first patron, and the man was devoted to him. But his wife is too strong for me. And now, sir, I must leave you, for I have had the misfortune to-day to lose the best valet in England, and I must make inquiry for him. I thank your Royal Highness for your kindness in receiving my nephew in so gracious a fashion."

"Till Friday, then," said the Prince, holding out his hand. "I have to go up to town in any case, for there is a poor devil of an East India Company's officer who has written to me in his distress. If I can raise a few hundreds, I shall see him and set things right for him. Now, Mr. Stone, you have your life before you, and I hope it will be one which your uncle may be proud of. You will honour the King, and show respect for the Constitution, Mr. Stone. And, hark ye, you will avoid

debt, and bear in mind that your honour is a sacred thing."

So I carried away a last impression of his sensual, good-humoured face, his high cravat and his broad leather thighs. Again we passed the strange rooms, the gilded monsters, and the gorgeous footmen, and it was with relief that I found myself out in the open air once more, with the broad blue sea in front of us, and the fresh evening breeze upon our faces.

8. *The Brighton Road*

MY uncle and I were up betimes next morning, but he was much out of temper, for no news had been heard of his valet Ambrose. He had indeed become like one of those ants of which I have read, who are so accustomed to be fed by smaller ants that when they are left to themselves they die of hunger. It was only by the aid of a man whom the landlord procured, and of Fox's valet, who had been sent expressly across, that his toilet was at last performed.

"I must win this race, nephew," said he, when he had finished breakfast; "I can't afford to be beat. Look out of the window and see if the Lades are there."

"I see a red four-in-hand in the square, and there is a crowd round it. Yes, I see the lady upon the box seat."

"Is our tandem out?"

"It is at the door."

"Come, then, and you shall have such a drive as you never had before."

He stood at the door pulling on his long brown driving-gauntlets, and giving his orders to the ostlers.

"Every ounce will tell," said he. "We'll leave that dinner-basket behind. And you can keep my dog for me, Coppinger. You know him and understand him. Let him have his warm milk and curaçoa the same as

usual. Whoa, my darlings, you'll have your fill of it before you reach Westminster Bridge."

"Shall I put in the toilet-case?" asked the landlord.

I saw the struggle upon my uncle's face, but he was true to his principles.

"Put it under the seat—the front seat," said he. "Nephew, you must keep your weight as far forward as possible. Can you do anything on a yard of tin? Well, if you can't, we'll leave the trumpet. Buckle that girth up, Thomas. Have you greased the hubs, as I told you? Well, jump up, nephew, and we'll see them off."

Quite a crowd had gathered in the Old Square: men and women, dark-coated tradesmen, bucks from the Prince's Court, and officers from Hove, all in a buzz of excitement; for Sir John Lade and my uncle were two of the most famous whips of the time, and a match between them was a thing to talk of for many a long day.

"The Prince will be sorry to have missed the start," said my uncle. "He doesn't show before midday. Ah, Jack, good morning! Your servant, madam! It's a fine day for a little bit of waggoning."

As our tandem came alongside of the four-in-hand with the two bonny bay mares gleaming like shot-silk in the sunshine, a murmur of admiration rose from the crowd. My uncle, in his fawn-coloured driving-coat, with all his harness of the same tint, looked the ideal of a Corinthian whip; while Sir John Lade, with his many-caped coat, his white hat, and his rough, weather-beaten face, might have taken his seat with a line of professionals upon any ale-house bench without anyone being able to pick him out as one of the wealthiest landowners in England. It was an age of eccentricity, but he had carried his peculiarities to a length which surprised even the out-and-outers by marrying the sweetheart of a famous highwayman when the gallows had come between her and her lover. She was perched by his side, looking very smart in a flowered bonnet and grey travelling-dress, while in front of them the four splendid coal-black

horses, with a flickering touch of gold upon their powerful well-curved quarters, were pawing the dust in their eagerness to be off.

"It's a hundred that you don't see us before Westminster with a quarter of an hour's start," said Sir John.

"I'll take you another hundred that we pass you," answered my uncle.

"Very good. Time's up. Good-bye!" He gave a *tchk* of the tongue, shook his reins, saluted with his whip, in true coachman's style, and away he went, taking the curve out of the square in a workmanlike fashion that fetched a cheer from the crowd. We heard the dwindling roar of the wheels upon the cobble-stones until they died away in the distance.

It seemed one of the longest quarters of an hour that I had ever known before the first stroke of nine boomed from the parish clock. For my part, I was fidgeting in my seat in my impatience, but my uncle's calm, pale face and large blue eyes were as tranquil and demure as those of the most unconcerned spectator. He was keenly on the alert, however, and it seemed to me that the stroke of the clock and the thong of his whip fell together—not in a blow, but in a sharp snap over the leader, which sent us flying with a jingle and a rattle upon our fifty miles' journey. I heard a roar from behind us, saw the gliding lines of windows with staring faces and waving handkerchiefs, and then we were off the stones and on to the good white road which curved away in front of us, with the sweep of the green downs upon either side.

I had been provided with shillings that the turnpike-gate might not stop us, but my uncle reined in the mares and took them at a very easy trot up all the heavy stretch which ends in Clayton Hill. He let them go then, and we flashed through Friar's Oak and across St. John's Common without more than catching a glimpse of the yellow cottage which contained all that I loved best. Never have I travelled at such a pace, and never have I felt such a sense of exhilaration from the rush of keen

upland air upon our faces, and from the sight of those two glorious creatures stretched to their utmost, with the roar of their hoofs and the rattle of our wheels as the light curricle bounded and swayed behind them.

"It's a long four miles up hill from here to Hand Cross," said my uncle, as we flew through Cuckfield. "I must ease them a bit, for I cannot afford to break the hearts of my cattle. They have the right blood in them, and they would gallop until they dropped if I were brute enough to let them. Stand up on the seat, nephew, and see if you can get a glimpse of them."

I stood up, steadying myself upon my uncle's shoulder, but though I could see for a mile, or perhaps a quarter more, there was not a sign of the four-in-hand.

"If he has sprung his cattle up all these hills they'll be spent ere they see Croydon," said he.

"They have four to two," said I.

"*J'en suis bien sûr*. Sir John's black strain makes a good, honest creature, but not fliers like these. There lies Cuckfield Place, where the towers are, yonder. Get your weight right forward on the splashboard now that we are going uphill, nephew. Look at the action of that leader: did ever you see anything more easy and more beautiful?"

We were taking the hill at a quiet trot, but even so, we made the carrier, walking in the shadow of his huge, broad-wheeled, canvas-covered waggon, stare at us in amazement. Close to Hand Cross we passed the Royal Brighton stage, which had left at half-past seven, dragging heavily up the slope, and its passengers, toiling along through the dust behind, gave us a cheer as we whirled by. At Hand Cross we caught a glimpse of the old landlord, hurrying out with his gin and his ginger-bread; but the dip of the ground was downwards now, and away we flew as fast as eight gallant hoofs could take us.

"Do you drive, nephew?"

"Very little, sir."

"There is no driving on the Brighton Road."

"How is that, sir?"

"Too good a road, nephew. I have only to give them their heads, and they will race me into Westminster. It wasn't always so. When I was a very young man one might learn to handle his twenty yards of tape here as well as elsewhere. There's not much really good waggonning now south of Leicestershire. Show me a man who can hit 'em and hold 'em on a Yorkshire dale-side, and that's the man who comes from the right school."

We had raced over Crawley Down and into the broad main street of Crawley village, flying between two country waggons in a way which showed me that even now a driver might do something on the road. With every turn I peered ahead, looking for our opponents, but my uncle seemed to concern himself very little about them, and occupied himself in giving me advice, mixed up with so many phrases of the craft, that it was all that I could do to follow him.

"Keep a finger for each, or you will have your reins clubbed," said he. "As to the whip, the less fanning the better if you have willing cattle; but when you want to put a little life into a coach, see that you get your thong on to the one that needs it, and don't let it fly round after you've hit. I've seen a driver warm up the off-side passenger on the roof behind him every time he tried to cut his off-side wheeler. I believe that is their dust over yonder."

A long stretch of road lay before us, barred with the shadows of wayside trees. Through the green fields a lazy blue river was drawing itself slowly along, passing under a bridge in front of us. Beyond was a young fir plantation, and over its olive line there rose a white whirl which drifted swiftly, like a cloud-scud on a breezy day.

"Yes, yes, it's they!" cried my uncle. "No one else would travel as fast. Come, nephew, we're half way when we cross the mole at Kimberham Bridge, and we've done it in two hours and fourteen minutes. The Prince drove to Carlton House with a three tandem in four hours and a half. The first half is the worst half,

and we might cut his time if all goes well. We should make up between this and Reigate."

And we flew. The bay mares seemed to know what that white puff in front of us signified, and they stretched themselves like greyhounds. We passed a phaeton and pair London-bound, and we left it behind as if it had been standing still. Trees, gates, cottages went dancing by. We heard the folks shouting from the fields, under the impression that we were a runaway. Faster and faster yet they raced, the hoofs rattling like castanets, the yellow manes flying, the wheels buzzing and every joint and rivet creaking and groaning, while the curricle swung and swayed until I found myself clutching to the side-rail. My uncle eased them and glanced at his watch as we saw the grey tiles and dingy red houses of Reigate in the hollow beneath us.

"We did the last six well under twenty minutes," said he. "We've time in hand now, and a little water at the Red Lion will do them no harm. Red four-in-hand passed, ostler?"

"Just gone, sir."

"Going hard?"

"Galloping full split, sir! Took the wheel off a butcher's 'cart at the corner of the High Street, and was out o' sight before the butcher's boy could see what had hurt him."

Z-z-z-z-ack! went the long thong, and away we flew once more. It was market day at Redhill, and the road was crowded with carts of produce, droves of bullocks and farmers' gigs. It was a sight to see how my uncle threaded his way amongst them all. Through the market-place we dashed amidst the shouting of men, the screaming of women and the scuttling of poultry, and then we were out in the country again, with the long, steep incline of the Redhill Road before us. My uncle waved his whip in the air with a shrill view-halloa.

There was the dust-cloud rolling up the hill in front of us, and through it we had a shadowy peep of the backs

of our opponents, with a flash of brasswork and a gleam of scarlet.

"There's half the game won, nephew. Now we must pass them. Hark forrard, my beauties! By George, if Kitty isn't foundered!"

The leader had suddenly gone dead lame. In an instant we were both out of the curricle and on our knees beside her. It was but a stone, wedged between frog and shoe in the off fore-foot, but it was a minute or two before we could wrench it out. When we had regained our places the Lades were round the curve of the hill and out of sight.

"Bad luck!" growled my uncle. "But they can't get away from us!" For the first time he touched the mares up, for he had but cracked the whip over their heads before. "If we catch them in the next few miles we can spare them for the rest of the way."

They were beginning to show signs of exhaustion. Their breath came quick and hoarse, and their beautiful coats were matted with moisture. At the top of the hill, however, they settled down into their swing once more.

"Where on earth have they got to?" cried my uncle. "Can you make them out on the road, nephew?"

We could see a long white ribbon of it, all dotted with carts and waggons coming from Croydon to Redhill, but there was no sign of the big red four-in-hand.

"There they are! Stole away! Stole away!" he cried, wheeling the mares round into a side road which struck to the right out of that which we had travelled. "There they are, nephew! On the brow of the hill!"

Sure enough, on the rise of a curve upon our right the four-in-hand had appeared, the horses stretched to the utmost. Our mares laid themselves out gallantly, and the distance between us began slowly to decrease. I found that I could see the black band upon Sir John's white hat, then that I could count the folds of his cape; finally, that I could see the pretty features of his wife as she looked back at us.

"We're on the side road to Godstone and Warlingham," said my uncle. "I suppose he thought that he could make better time by getting out of the way of the market carts. But we've got the deuce of a hill to come down. You'll see some fun, nephew, or I am mistaken."

As he spoke I suddenly saw the wheels of the four-in-hand disappear, then the body of it, and then the two figures upon the box, as suddenly and abruptly as if it had bumped down the first three steps of some gigantic stairs. An instant later we had reached the same spot, and there was the road beneath us, steep and narrow, winding in long curves into the valley. The four-in-hand was swishing down it as hard as the horses could gallop.

"Thought so!" cried my uncle. "If he doesn't brake, why should I? Now, my darlings, one good spurt, and we'll show them the colour of our tailboard."

We shot over the brow and flew madly down the hill with the great red coach roaring and thundering before us. Already we were in her dust, so that we could see nothing but the dim scarlet blur in the heart of it, rocking and rolling, with its outline hardening at every stride. We could hear the crack of the whip in front of us, and the shrill voice of Lady Lade as she screamed to the horses. My uncle was very quiet, but when I glanced up at him I saw that his lips were set and his eyes shining, with just a little flush upon each pale cheek. There was no need to urge on the mares, for they were already flying at a pace which could neither be stopped nor controlled. Our leader's head came abreast of the off hind wheel, then of the off front one—then for a hundred yards we did not gain an inch, and then with a spurt the bay leader was neck to neck with the black wheeler, and our fore wheel within an inch of their hind one.

"Dusty work!" said my uncle, quietly.

"Fan 'em, Jack! Fan 'em!" shrieked the lady.

He sprang up and lashed at his horses.

"Look out, Tregellis!" he shouted. "There's a damnation spill coming for somebody."

We had got fairly abreast of them now, the rumps of the horses exactly a-line and the fore wheels whizzing together. There was not six inches to spare in the breadth of the road, and every instant I expected to feel the jar of a locking wheel. But now, as we came out from the dust, we could see what was ahead, and my uncle whistled between his teeth at the sight.

Two hundred yards or so in front of us there was a bridge, with wooden posts and rails upon either side. The road narrowed down at the point, so that it was obvious that the two carriages abreast could not possibly get over. One must give way to the other. Already our wheels were abreast of their wheelers.

"I lead!" shouted my uncle. "You must pull them, Lade!"

"Not I!" he roared.

"No, by George!" shrieked her ladyship. "Fan 'em, Jack; keep on fanning 'em!"

It seemed to me that we were all going to eternity together. But my uncle did the only thing that could have saved us. By a desperate effort we might just clear the coach before reaching the mouth of the bridge. He sprang up, and lashed right and left at the mares, who, maddened by the unaccustomed pain, hurled themselves on in a frenzy. Down we thundered together, all shouting, I believe, at the top of our voices in the madness of the moment; but still we were drawing steadily away and we were almost clear of the leaders when we flew on to the bridge. I glanced back at the coach, and I saw Lady Lade, with her savage little white teeth clenched together, throw herself forward and tug with both hands at the off-side reins.

"Jam them, Jack!" she cried. "Jam the —— before they can pass."

Had she done it an instant sooner we should have crashed against the wood-work, carried it away, and been hurled into the deep gully below. As it was, it was not the powerful haunch of the black leader which caught

our wheel, but the forequarter, which had not weight enough to turn us from our course. I saw a red wet seam gape suddenly through the black hair, and next instant we were flying alone down the road, whilst the four-in-hand had halted, and Sir John and his lady were down in the road together tending to the wounded horse.

"Easy now, my beauties!" cried my uncle, settling down into his seat again, and looking back over his shoulder. "I could not have believed that Sir John Lade would have been guilty of such a trick as pulling that leader across. I do not permit a *mauvaise plaisanterie* of that sort. He shall hear from me to-night."

"It was the lady," said I.

My uncle's brow cleared, and he began to laugh.

"It was little Letty, was it?" said he. "I might have known it. There's a touch of the late lamented Sixteen-string Jack about the trick. Well, it is only messages of another kind that I send to a lady, so we'll just drive on our way, nephew, and thank our stars that we bring whole bones over the Thames."

We stopped at the Greyhound, at Croydon, where the two good little mares were sponged and petted and fed, after which, at an easier pace, we made our way through Norbury and Streatham. At last the fields grew fewer and the walls longer. The outlying villas closed up thicker and thicker, until their shoulders met, and we were driving between a double line of houses with garish shops at the corners, and such a stream of traffic as I had never seen, roaring down the centre. Then suddenly we were on a broad bridge with a dark coffee-brown river flowing sulkily beneath it, and bluff-bowed barges drifting down upon its bosom. To right and left stretched a broken, irregular line of many-coloured houses winding along either bank as far as I could see.

"That's the House of Parliament, nephew," said my uncle, pointing with his whip, "and the black towers are Westminster Abbey. How do, your Grace? How do? That's the Duke of Norfolk—the stout man in

blue upon the swish-tailed mare. Now we are in Whitehall. There's the Treasury on the left, and the Horse Guards, and the Admiralty, where the stone dolphins are carved above the gate."

I had the idea, which a country-bred lad brings up with him, that London was merely a wilderness of houses, but I was astonished now to see the green slopes and the lovely spring trees showing between.

"Yes, those are the Privy Gardens," said my uncle, "and there is the window out of which Charles took his last step on to the scaffold. You wouldn't think the mares had come fifty miles, would you? See how *les petites chéries* step out for the credit of their master. Look at the barouche, with the sharp-featured man peeping out of the window. That's Pitt, going down to the House. We are coming into Pall Mall now, and this great building on the left is Carlton House, the Prince's Palace. There's St. James's, the big, dingy place with the clock, and the two red-coated sentries before it. And here's the famous street of the same name, nephew, which is the very centre of the world, and here's Jermyn Street opening out of it, and finally, here's my own little box, and we are well under the five hours from Brighton Old Square."

9. *Watier's*

MY uncle's house in Jermyn Street was quite a small one—five rooms and an attic. "A man-cook and a cottage," he said, "are all that a wise man requires." On the other hand, it was furnished with the neatness and taste which belonged to his character, so that his most luxurious friends found something in the tiny rooms which made them discontented with their own sumptuous mansions. Even the attic, which had been converted into my bedroom, was the most perfect little bijou attic that could possibly be imagined. Beautiful and valuable knick-knacks filled every corner of every

apartment, and the house had become a perfect miniature museum which would have delighted a virtuoso. My uncle explained the presence of all these pretty things with a shrug of his shoulders and a wave of his hands. "They are *des petites cadeaux*," said he, "but it would be an indiscretion for me to say more."

We found a note from Ambrose waiting for us which increased rather than explained the mystery of his disappearance.

"My dear Sir Charles Tregellis," it ran, "it will ever be a subject of regret to me that the force of circumstances should have compelled me to leave your service in so abrupt a fashion, but something occurred during our journey from Friar's Oak to Brighton which left me without any possible alternative. I trust, however, that my absence may prove to be but a temporary one. The isinglass recipe for the shirt-fronts is in the strong-box at Drummond's Bank.—Yours obediently, AMBROSE."

"Well, I suppose I must fill his place as best I can," said my uncle, moodily. "But how on earth could something have occurred to make him leave me at a time when we were going full-trot down hill in my curricle? I shall never find his match again either for chocolate or cravats. *Je suis desolé!* But, now, nephew, we must send to Weston and have you fitted up. It is not for a gentleman to go to a shop, but for the shop to come to the gentleman. Until you have your clothes you must remain *en retraite*."

The measuring was a most solemn and serious function, though it was nothing to the trying-on two days later, when my uncle stood by in an agony of apprehension as each garment was adjusted, he and Weston arguing over every seam and lapel and skirt until I was dizzy with turning round in front of them. Then, just as I had hoped that all was settled, in came young Mr. Brummell, who promised to be an even greater exquisite than my uncle, and the whole matter had to be thrashed out between them. He was a good-sized man, this Brummell,

with a long, fair face, light brown hair and slight sandy side-whiskers. His manner was languid, his voice drawling, and while he eclipsed my uncle in the extravagance of his speech, he had not the air of manliness and decision which underlay all my kinsman's affectations.

"Why, George," cried my uncle, "I thought you were with your regiment."

"I've sent in my papers," drawled the other.

"I thought it would come to that."

"Yes. The Tenth was ordered to Manchester, and they could hardly expect me to go to a place like that. Besides, I found the major monstrous rude."

"How was that?"

"He expected me to know about his absurd drill, Tregellis, and I had other things to think of, as you may suppose. I had no difficulty in taking my right place on parade, for there was a trooper with a red nose on a flea-bitten grey, and I had observed that my post was always immediately in front of him. This saved a great deal of trouble. The other day, however, when I came on parade, I galloped up one line and down the other, but the deuce a glimpse could I get of that long nose of his! Then, just as I was at my wits' end, I caught sight of him, alone at one side; so I formed up in front. It seems he had been put there to keep the ground, and the major so far forgot himself as to say that I knew nothing of my duties."

My uncle laughed, and Brummell looked me up and down with his large, intolerant eyes.

"These will do very passably," said he. "Buff and blue are always very gentlemanlike. But a sprigged waistcoat would have been better."

"I think not," said my uncle, warmly.

"My dear Tregellis, you are infallible upon a cravat, but you must allow me the right of my own judgment upon vests. I like it vastly as it stands, but a touch of red sprig would give it the finish that it needs."

They argued with many examples and analogies for a good ten minutes, revolving round me at the same time

with their heads on one side and their glasses to their eyes. It was a relief to me when they at last agreed upon a compromise.

"You must not let anything I have said shake your faith in Sir Charles's judgment, Mr. Stone," said Brummell, very earnestly.

I assured him that I should not.

"If you were my nephew, I should expect you to follow my taste. But you will cut a very good figure as it is. I had a young cousin who came up to town last year with a recommendation to my care. But he would take no advice. At the end of the second week I met him coming down St. James's Street in a snuff-coloured coat cut by a country tailor. He bowed to me. Of course I knew what was due to myself. I looked all round him, and there was an end to his career in town. You are from the country, Mr. Stone?"

"From Sussex, sir."

"Sussex! Why, that is where I send my washing to. There is an excellent clear-starcher living near Hayward's Heath. I send my shirts two at a time, for if you send more it excites the woman and diverts her attention. I cannot abide anything but country washing. But I should be vastly sorry to have to live there. What can a man find to do?"

"You don't hunt, George?"

"When I do, it's a woman. But surely you don't go to hounds, Charles?"

"I was out with the Belvoir last winter."

"The Belvoir! Did you hear how I smoked Rutland? The story has been in the clubs this month past. I bet him that my bag would weigh more than his. He got three and a half brace, but I shot his liver-coloured pointer, so he had to pay. But as to hunting, what amusement can there be in flying about among a crowd of greasy, galloping farmers? Every man to his own taste, but Brookes's window by day and a snug corner of the macao table at Watier's by night, give me all I want

for mind and body. You heard how I plucked Montague the brewer ?"

"I have been out of town."

"I had eight thousand from him at a sitting. 'I shall drink your beer in future, Mr. Brewer,' said I. 'Every blackguard in London does,' said he. It was monstrous impolite of him, but some people cannot lose with grace. Well, I am going down to Clarges Street to pay Jew King a little of my interest. Are you bound that way ? Well, good-bye, then ! I'll see you and your young friend at the club or in the Mall, no doubt," and he sauntered off upon his way.

"That young man is destined to take my place," said my uncle, gravely, when Brummell had departed. "He is quite young and of no descent, but he has made his way by his cool effrontery, his natural taste and his extravagance of speech. There is no man who can be impolite in so polished a fashion. He has a half-smile, and a way of raising his eyebrows, for which he will be shot one of these mornings. Already his opinion is quoted in the clubs as a rival to my own. Well, every man has his day, and when I am convinced that mine is past, St. James's Street shall know me no more, for it is not in my nature to be second to any man. But now, nephew, in that buff and blue suit you may pass anywhere ; so, if you please, we will step into my *vis-à-vis*, and I will show you something of the town.

How can I describe all that we saw and all that we did upon that lovely spring day ? To me it was as if I had been wafted to a fairy world, and my uncle might have been some benevolent enchanter in a high-collared, long-tailed coat, who was guiding me about in it. He showed me the West-end streets, with the bright carriages and the gaily dressed ladies and sombre-clad men, all crossing and hurrying and recrossing like an ants' nest when you turn it over with a stick. Never had I formed a conception of such endless banks of houses, and such a ceaseless

stream of life flowing between. Then we passed down the Strand, where the crowd was thicker than ever, and even penetrated beyond Temple Bar and into the City, though my uncle begged me not to mention it, for he would not wish it to be generally known. There I saw the Exchange and the Bank and Lloyd's Coffee House, with the brown-coated, sharp-faced merchants and the hurrying clerks, the huge horses and the busy draymen. It was a very different world this from that which we had left in the West—a world of energy and of strength, where there was no place for the listless and the idle. Young as I was, I knew that it was here, in the forest of merchant shipping, in the bales which swung up to the warehouse windows, in the loaded waggons which roared over the cobblestones, that the power of Britain lay. Here, in the City of London, was the taproot from which Empire and wealth and so many other fine leaves had sprouted. Fashion and speech and manners may change, but the spirit of enterprise within that square mile or two of land must not change, for when it withers all that has grown from it must wither also.

We lunched at Stephen's, the fashionable inn in Bond Street, where I saw a line of tilburys and saddle-horses, which stretched from the door to the further end of the street. And thence we went to the Mall in St. James's Park, and thence to Brookes's, the great Whig club, and thence again to Watier's, where the men of fashion used to gamble. Everywhere I met the same sort of men, with their stiff figures and small waists, all showing the utmost deference to my uncle, and for his sake an easy tolerance of me. The talk was always such as I had already heard at the Pavilion : talk of politics, talk of the King's health, talk of the Prince's extravagance, of the expected renewal of war, of horse-racing and of the Ring. I saw, too, that eccentricity was, as my uncle had told me, the fashion ; and if the folk upon the Continent look upon us even to this day as being a nation of lunatics, it is no doubt a tradition handed down from the time when the

only travellers whom they were likely to see were drawn from the class which I was now meeting.

It was an age of heroism and of folly. On the one hand soldiers, sailors and statesmen of the quality of Pitt, Nelson and afterwards Wellington, had been forced to the front by the imminent menace of Buonaparte. We were great in arms, and were soon also to be great in literature, for Scott and Byron were in their day the strongest forces in Europe. On the other hand, a touch of madness, real or assumed, was a passport through doors which were closed to wisdom and to virtue. The man who could enter a drawing-room walking upon his hands, the man who had filed his teeth that he might whistle like a coachman, the man who always spoke his thoughts aloud and so kept his guests in a quiver of apprehension, these were the people who found it easy to come to the front in London society. Nor could the heroism and the folly be kept apart, for there were few who could quite escape the contagion of the times. In an age when the Premier was a heavy drinker, the Leader of the Opposition a libertine, and the Prince of Walcs a combination of the two, it was hard to know where to look for a man whose private and public characters were equally lofty. At the same time, with all its faults it was a *strong* age, and you will be fortunate if in your time the country produces five such names as Pitt, Fox, Scott, Nelson and Wellington.

It was in Watier's that night, seated by my uncle on one of the red velvet settees at the side of the room, that I had pointed out to me some of those singular characters whose fame and eccentricities are even now not wholly forgotten in the world. The long, many-pillared room, with its mirrors and chandeliers, was crowded with full-blooded, loud-voiced men-about-town, all in the same dark evening dress with white silk stockings, cambric shirt-fronts, and little, flat chapeau-bras under their arms.

"The acid-faced old gentleman with the thin legs is the Marquis of Queensberry," said my uncle. "His

chaise was driven nineteen miles in an hour in a match against the Count Taafe, and he sent a message fifty miles in thirty minutes by throwing it from hand to hand in a cricket-ball. The man he is talking to is Sir Charles Bunbury, of the Jockey Club, who had the Prince warned off the Heath at Newmarket on account of the in-and-out riding of Sam Chifney, his jockey. There's Captain Barclay going up to them now. He knows more about training than any man alive, and he has walked ninety miles in twenty-one hours. You have only to look at his calves to see that Nature built him for it. There's another walker there, the man with a flowered vest, standing near the fireplace. That is Buck Whalley, who walked to Jerusalem in a long blue coat, top-boots and buckskins."

"Why did he do that, sir?" I asked, in astonishment.

My uncle shrugged his shoulders.

"It was his humour," said he. "He walked into society through it, and that was better worth reaching than Jerusalem. There's Lord Petersham, the man with the beaky nose. He always rises at six in the evening, and he has laid down the finest cellar of snuff in Europe. It was he who ordered his valet to put half a dozen of sherry by his bed and call him the day after to-morrow. He's talking to Lord Panmure, who can take his six bottles of claret and argue with a bishop after it. The lean man with the weak knees is General Scott, who lives upon toast and water and has won £200,000 at whist. He is talking to young Lord Blandford, who gave £1800 for a Boccaccio the other day. Evening, Dudley!"

"Evening, Tregellis!" An elderly, vacant-looking man had stopped before us and was looking me up and down.

"Some young cub Charlie Tregellis has caught in the country," he murmured. "He doesn't look as if he would be much credit to him. Been out of town, Tregellis?"

"For a few days."

"Hem!" said the man, transferring his sleepy gaze

to my uncle. "He's looking pretty bad. He'll be going into the country feet foremost some of these days if he doesn't pull up!" He nodded, and passed on.

"You mustn't look so mortified, nephew," said my uncle, smiling. "That's old Lord Dudley, and he has a trick of thinking aloud. People used to be offended, but they take no notice of him now. It was only last week, when he was dining at Lord Elgin's, that he apologised to the company for the shocking bad cooking. He thought he was at his own table, you see. It gives him a place of his own in society. That's Lord Harewood he has fastened on to now. Harewood's peculiarity is to mimic the Prince in everything. One day the Prince hid his queue behind the collar of his coat, so Harewood cut his off, thinking that they were going out of fashion. Here's Lumley, the ugly man. '*L'homme laid*' they called him in Paris. The other one is Lord Foley—they call him No. 11, on account of his thin legs."

"There is Mr. Brummell, sir," said I.

"Yes, he'll come to us presently. That young man has certainly a future before him. Do you observe the way in which he looks round the room from under his drooping eyelids, as though it were a condescension that he should have entered it? Small conceits are intolerable, but when they are pushed to the uttermost they become respectable. How do, George?"

"Have you heard about Vereker Merton?" asked Brummell, strolling up with one or two other exquisites at his heels. "He has run away with his father's woman-cook, and actually married her."

"What did Lord Merton do?"

"He congratulated him warmly, and confessed that he had always underrated his intelligence. He is to live with the young couple, and make a handsome allowance on condition that the bride sticks to her old duties. By the way, there was a rumour that you were about to marry, Tregellis."

"I think not," answered my uncle. "It would be a

mistake to overwhelm one by attentions which are a pleasure to many."

"My view, exactly, and very neatly expressed," cried Brummell. "Is it fair to break a dozen hearts in order to intoxicate one with rapture? I'm off to the Continent next week."

"Bailiffs?" asked one of his companions.

"Too bad, Pierrepoint. No, no; it is pleasure and instruction combined. Besides, it is necessary to go to Paris for your little things, and if there is a chance of the war breaking out again, it would be well to lay in a supply."

"Quite right," said my uncle, who seemed to have made up his mind to outdo Brummell in extravagance. "I used to get my sulphur-coloured gloves from the Palais Royal. When the war broke out in '93 I was cut off from them for nine years. Had it not been for a lugger which I specially hired to smuggle them, I might have been reduced to English tan."

"The English are excellent at a flat-iron or a kitchen poker, but anything more delicate is beyond them."

"Our tailors are good," cried my uncle, "but our stuffs lack taste and variety. The war has made us more *rococo* than ever. It has cut us off from travel, and there is nothing to match travel for expanding the mind. Last year, for example, I came upon some new waistcoating in the Square of San Marco, at Venice. It was yellow, with the prettiest little twill of pink running through it. How could I have seen it had I not travelled? I brought it back with me, and for a time it was all the rage."

"The Prince took it up."

"Yes, he usually follows my lead. We dressed so alike last year that we were frequently mistaken for each other. It tells against me, but so it was. He often complains that things do not look as well upon him as upon me, but how can I make the obvious reply? By the way, George, I did not see you at the Marchioness of Dover's ball."

"Yes, I was there, and lingered for a quarter of an hour or so. I am surprised that you did not see me. I did not go past the doorway, however, for undue preference gives rise to jealousy."

"I went early," said my uncle, "for I had heard that there were to be some tolerable *débutantes*. It always pleases me vastly when I am able to pass a compliment to any of them. It has happened, but not often, for I keep to my own standard."

So they talked, these singular men, and I, looking from one to the other, could not imagine how they could help bursting out a-laughing in each other's faces. But on the contrary, their conversation was very grave, and filled out with many little bows, and opening and shutting of snuff-boxes, and flickings of laced handkerchiefs. Quite a crowd had gathered silently around, and I could see that the talk had been regarded as a contest between two men who were looked upon as rival arbiters of fashion. It was finished by the Marquis of Queensberry passing his arm through Brummell's and leading him off, while my uncle threw out his laced cambric shirt-front and shot his ruffles as if he were well satisfied with his share in the encounter. It is seven-and-forty years since I looked upon that circle of dandies, and where, now, are their dainty little hats, their wonderful waistcoats, and their boots, in which one could arrange one's cravat? They lived strange lives, these men, and they died strange deaths—some by their own hands, some as beggars, some in a debtor's gaol, some, like the most brilliant of them all, in a madhouse in a foreign land.

"There is the card-room, Rodney," said my uncle, as we passed an open door on our way out. Glancing in, I saw a line of little green baize tables with small groups of men sitting round, while at one side was a longer one, from which there came a continuous murmur of voices. "You may lose what you like in there, save only your nerve or your temper," my uncle continued. "Ah, Sir Lothian, I trust that the luck was with you?"

A tall, thin man, with a hard, austere face, had stepped out of the open doorway. His heavily thatched eyebrows covered quick, furtive grey eyes, and his gaunt features were hollowed at the cheek and temple like water-grooved flint. He was dressed entirely in black, and I noticed that his shoulders swayed a little as if he had been drinking.

"Lost like the deuce," he snapped.

"Dice?"

"No, whist."

"You couldn't get very hard hit over that."

"Couldn't you?" he snarled. "Play a hundred a trick and a thousand on the rub, losing steadily for five hours, and see what you think of it."

My uncle was evidently struck by the haggard look upon the other's face.

"I hope it's not very bad," he said.

"Bad enough. It won't bear talking about. By the way, Tregellis, have you got your man for this fight yet?"

"No."

"You seem to be hanging in the wind a long time. It's play or pay, you know. I shall claim forfeit if you don't come to scratch."

"If you will name your day I shall produce my man, Sir Lothian," said my uncle, coldly.

"This day four weeks, if you like."

"Very good. The 18th of May."

"I hope to have changed my name by then!"

"How is that?" asked my uncle, in surprise.

"It is just possible that I may be Lord Avon."

"What, you have had some news?" cried my uncle, and I noticed a tremor in his voice.

"I've had my agent over at Monte Video, and he believes he has proof that Avon died there. Anyhow, it is absurd to suppose that because a murderer chooses to fly from justice——"

"I won't have you use that word, Sir Lothian," cried my uncle, sharply.

"You were there as I was. You know that he was a murderer."

"I tell you that you shall not say so."

Sir Lothian's fierce little grey eyes had to lower themselves before the imperious anger which shone in my uncle's.

"Well, to let that point pass, it is monstrous to suppose that the title and the estates can remain hung up in this way for ever. I'm the heir, Tregellis, and I'm going to have my rights."

"I am, as you are aware, Lord Avon's dearest friend," said my uncle, sternly. "His disappearance has not affected my love for him, and until his fate is finally ascertained, I shall exert myself to see that *his* rights also are respected."

"His rights would be a long drop and a cracked spine," Sir Lothian answered, and then, changing his manner suddenly, he laid his hand upon my uncle's sleeve.

"Come, come, Tregellis, I was his friend as well as you," said he. "But we cannot alter the facts, and it is rather late in the day for us to fall out over them. Your invitation holds good for Friday night?"

"Certainly."

"I shall bring Crab Wilson with me, and finally arrange the conditions of our little wager."

"Very good, Sir Lothian. I shall hope to see you."

They bowed, and my uncle stood a little time looking after him as he made his way amidst the crowd.

"A good sportsman, nephew," said he. "A bold rider, the best pistol-shot in England, but . . . a dangerous man!"

10. *The Men of the Ring*

IT was at the end of my first week in London that my uncle gave a supper to the Fancy, as was usual for gentlemen of that time if they wished to figure before the public as Corinthians and patrons of sport.

He had invited not only the chief fighting men of the day, but also those men of fashion who were most interested in the Ring: Mr. Fletcher Reid, Lord Saye and Sele, Sir Lothian Hume, Sir John Lade, Colonel Montgomery, Sir Thomas Apreece, the Hon. Berkeley Craven and many more. The rumour that the Prince was to be present had already spread through the clubs, and invitations were eagerly sought after.

The Waggon and Horses was a well-known sporting house, with an old prize-fighter for landlord. And the arrangements were as primitive as the most Bohemian could wish. It was one of the many curious fashions which have now died out, that men who were *blasé* from luxury and high living seemed to find a fresh piquancy in life by descending to the lowest resorts, so that the night-houses and gambling dens in Covent Garden or the Haymarket often gathered illustrious company under their smoke-blackened ceilings. It was a change for them to turn their backs upon the cooking of Weltjie and of Ude, or the chambertin of old Q., and to dine upon a porter-house steak washed down by a pint of ale from a pewter pot.

A rough crowd had assembled in the street to see the fighting-men go in, and my uncle warned me to look to my pockets as we pushed our way through it. Within was a large room with faded red curtains, a sanded floor, and walls which were covered with prints of pugilists and race-horses. Brown liquor-stained tables were dotted about in it, and round one of these half a dozen formidable-looking men were seated, while one, the roughest of all, was perched upon the table itself, swinging his legs to and fro. A tray of small glasses and pewter mugs stood beside them.

"The boys were thirsty, sir, so I brought up some ale and some liptrap," whispered the landlord; "I thought you would have no objection, sir."

"Quite right, Bob! How are you all? How are you, Maddox? How are you, Baldwin? Ah, Belcher, I am very glad to see you."

The fighting-men rose and took their hats off, except the fellow on the table, who continued to swing his legs and to look my uncle very coolly in the face.

"How are you, Berks?"

"Pretty tidy. 'Ow are you?"

"Say 'sir' when you speak to a genelman," said Belcher, and with a sudden tilt of the table he sent Berks flying almost into my uncle's arms.

"See now, Jem, none o' that!" said Berks, sulkily.

"I'll learn you manners, Joe, which is more than ever your father did. You're not drinkin' black-jack in a boozin' ken, but you are meetin' noble, slap-up Corinthians, and it's for you to behave as such."

"I've always been reckoned a genelmanlike sort of man," said Berks, thickly, "but if so be as I've said or done what I 'adn't ought to——"

"There, there, Berks, that's all right!" cried my uncle, only too anxious to smooth things over and to prevent a quarrel at the outset of the evening. "Here are some more of our friends. How are you, Apreece? How are you, Colonel? Well, Jackson, you are looking vastly better. Good evening, Lade. I trust Lady Lade was none the worse for our pleasant drive. Ah, Mendoza, you look fit enough to throw your hat over the ropes this instant. Sir Lothian, I am glad to see you. You will find some old friends here."

Amid the stream of Corinthians and fighting-men who were thronging into the room I had caught a glimpse of the sturdy figure and broad, good-humoured face of Champion Harrison. The sight of him was like a whiff of South-Down air coming into that low-roofed, oil-smelling room, and I ran forward to shake him by the hand.

"Why, Master Rodney—or I should say Mr. Stone, I suppose—you've changed out of all knowledge. I can't hardly believe that it was really you that used to come down to blow the bellows when Boy Jim and I were at the anvil. Well, you are fine, to be sure!"

"What's the news of Friar's Oak?" I asked, eagerly.

"Your father was down to chat with me, Master Rodney, and he tells me that the war is going to break out again, and that he hopes to see you here in London before many days are past; for he is coming up to see Lord Nelson and to make inquiry about a ship. Your mother is well, and I saw her in church on Sunday."

"And Boy Jim?"

Champion Harrison's good-humoured face clouded over.

"He'd set his heart very much on comin' here to-night, but there were reasons why I didn't wish him to, and so there's a shadow betwixt us. It's the first that ever was, and I feel it, Master Rodney. Between ourselves, I have very good reason to wish him to stay with me, and I am sure that, with his high spirit and his ideas, he would never settle down again after once he had a taste o' London. I left him behind me with enough work to keep him busy until I get back to him."

A tall and beautifully proportioned man, very elegantly dressed, was strolling towards us. He stared in surprise and held out his hand to my companion.

"Why, Jack Harrison!" he cried. "This is a resurrection. Where in the world did you come from?"

"Glad to see you, Jackson," said my companion. "You look as well and as young as ever."

"Thank you, yes. I resigned the belt when I could get no one to fight me for it, and I took to teaching."

"I'm doing smith's work down Sussex way."

"I've often wondered why you never had a shy at my belt. I tell you honestly, between man and man, I'm very glad you didn't."

"Well, it's real good of you to say that, Jackson. I might ha' done it, perhaps, but the old woman was against it. She's been a good wife to me and I can't go against her. But I feel a bit lonesome here, for these boys are since my time."

"You could do some of them over now," said Jackson,

feeling my friend's upper arm. "No better bit of stuff was ever seen in a twenty-four-foot ring. It would be a rare treat to see you take some of these young ones on. Won't you let me spring you on them?"

Harrison's eyes glistened at the idea, but he shook his head.

"It won't do, Jackson. My old woman holds my promise. That's Belcher, ain't it—the good-lookin' young chap with the flash coat?"

"Yes, that's Jem. You've not seen him! He's a jewel."

"So I've heard. Who's the youngster beside him? He looks a tidy chap."

"That's a new man from the West. Crab Wilson's his name."

Harrison looked at him with interest. "I've heard of him," said he. "They are getting a match on for him, ain't they?"

"Yes. Sir Lothian Hume, the thin-faced gentleman over yonder, has backed him against Sir Charles Tregellis's man. We're to hear about the match to-night, I understand. Jem Belcher thinks great things of Crab Wilson. There's Belcher's young brother, Tom. He's looking out for a match, too. They say he's quicker than Jem with the mufflers, but he can't hit as hard. I was speaking of your brother, Jem."

"The young 'un will make his way," said Belcher, who had come across to us. "He's more a sparrer than a fighter just at present, but when his gristle sets he'll take on anything on the list. Bristol's as full o' young fightin'-men now as a bin is of bottles. We've got two more comin' up—Gully and Pearce—who'll make yon London milling coves wish they was back in the west country again."

"Here's the Prince," said Jackson, as a hum and bustle rose from the door.

I saw George come bustling in, with a good-humoured smile upon his comely face. My uncle welcomed him, and led some of the Corinthians up to be presented.

"We'll have trouble, gov'nor," said Belcher to Jackson. "Here's Joe Berks drinkin' gin out of a mug, and you know what a swine he is when he's drunk."

"You must put a stopper on 'im, gov'nor," said several of the other prize-fighters. "'E ain't what you'd call a charmer when 'e's sober, but there's no standing 'im when 'e's fresh."

Jackson, on account of his prowess and of the tact which he possessed, had been chosen as general regulator of the whole prize-fighting body, by whom he was usually alluded to as the Commander-in-Chief. He and Belcher went across now to the table upon which Berks was still perched. The ruffian's face was already flushed, and his eyes heavy and bloodshot.

"You must keep yourself in hand to-night, Berks," said Jackson. "The Prince is here, and——"

"I never set eyes on 'im yet," cried Berks, lurching off the table. "Where is 'e, gov'nor? Tell 'im Joe Berks would like to do 'isself proud by shakin' 'im by the 'and."

"No, you don't, Joe," said Jackson, laying his hand upon Berks's chest, as he tried to push his way through the crowd. "You've got to keep your place, Joe, or we'll put you where you can make all the noise you like."

"Where's that, gov'nor?"

"Into the street, through the window. We're going to have a peaceful evening, as Jem Belcher and I will show you if you get up to any of your Whitechapel games."

"No 'arm, gov'nor," grumbled Berks. "I'm sure I've always 'ad the name of bein' a very genelmanlike man."

"So I've always said, Joe Berks, and mind you prove yourself such. But the supper is ready for us, and there's the Prince and Lord Sele going in. Two and two, lads, and don't forget whose company you are in."

The supper was laid in a large room, with Union Jacks and mottoes hung thickly upon the walls. The tables were arranged in three sides of a square, my uncle occupying the centre of the principal one, with the Prince upon his right and Lord Sele upon his left. By

his wise precaution the seats had been allotted beforehand so that the gentlemen might be scattered among the professionals and no risk run of two enemies finding themselves together, or a man who had been recently beaten falling into the company of his conqueror. For my own part, I had Champion Harrison upon one side of me and a stout, florid-faced man upon the other, who whispered to me that he was " Bill Warr, landlord of the One Tun public-house, of Jermyn Street, and one of the gamest men upon the list."

" It's my flesh that's beat me, sir," said he. " It creeps over me amazin' fast. I should fight at thirteen-eight, and 'ere I am nearly seventeen. It's the business that does it, what with lollin' about behind the bar all day, and bein' afraid to refuse a wet for fear of offendin' a customer. It's been the ruin of many a good fightin'-man before me."

" You should take to my job," said Harrison. " I'm a smith by trade, and I've not put on half a stone in fifteen years."

" Some take to one thing and some to another, but the most of us try to 'ave a bar-parlour of our own. There's Will Wood, that I beat in forty rounds in the thick of a snowstorm down Navestock way, 'e drives a 'ackney. Young Firby, the ruffian, 'e's a waiter now. Dick 'Umphries sells coals—'e was always of a genelmanly disposition. George Ingleston is a brewer's drayman. We all find our own cribs. But there's one thing you are saved by livin' in the country, and that is 'avin' the young Corinthians and bloods about town smackin' you eternally in the face."

This was the last inconvenience which I should have expected a famous prize-fighter to be subjected to, but several bull-faced fellows at the other side of the table nodded their concurrence.

" You're right, Bill," said one of them. " There's no one has had more trouble with them than I have. In they come of an evenin' into my bar, with the wine

in their heads. 'Are you Tom Owen, the bruiser?' says one o' them. 'At your service, sir,' says I. 'Take that, then,' says he, and it's a clip on the nose, or a back-handed slap across the chops as likely as not. Then they can brag all their lives that they had hit Tom Owen."

"D'you draw their cork in return?" asked Harrison.

"I argey it out with them. I say to them, 'Now, gents, fightin' is my profession, and I don't fight for love any more than a doctor doctors for love, or a butcher gives away a loin chop. Put up a small purse, master, and I'll do you over and proud. But don't expect that you're goin' to come here and get glutted by a middle-weight champion for nothing.'"

"That's my way, too, Tom," said my burly neighbour. "If they put down a guinea on the counter—which they do if they 'ave been drinkin' very 'eavy—I give them what I think is about a guinea's worth and take the money."

"But if they don't?"

"Why, then, it's a common assault, d'ye see, against the body of 'is Majesty's liege, William Warr, and I 'as 'em before the beak next mornin', and it's a week or twenty shillin's."

Meanwhile the supper was in full swing—one of those solid and uncompromising meals which prevailed in the days of your grandfathers, and which may explain to some of you why you never set eyes upon that relative.

Great rounds of beef, saddles of mutton, smoking tongues, veal and ham pies, turkeys and chickens and geese, with every variety of vegetables, and a succession of fiery cherries and heavy ales were the main staple of the feast. It was the same meal and the same cooking as their Norse or German ancestors might have sat down to fourteen centuries before, and, indeed, as I looked through the steam of the dishes at the lines of fierce and rugged faces, and the mighty shoulders which rounded themselves over the board, I could have imagined myself at one of those old-world carousals of which I had read, where the savage company gnawed the joints to the bone,

and then, with murderous horse-play, hurled the remains at their prisoners. Here and there the pale, aquiline features of a sporting Corinthian recalled rather the Norman type, but in the main these stolid, heavy-jowled faces, belonging to men whose whole life was a battle, were the nearest suggestion which we have had in modern times of those fierce pirates and rovers from whose loins we have sprung.

And yet, as I looked carefully from man to man in the line which faced me, I could see that the English, although they were ten to one, had not the game entirely to themselves, but that other races had shown that they could produce fighting-men worthy to rank with the best.

There were, it is true, no finer or braver men in the room than Jackson and Jem Belcher, the one with his magnificent figure, his small waist and Herculean shoulders ; the other as graceful as an old Grecian statue, with a head whose beauty many a sculptor had wished to copy, and with those long, delicate lines in shoulder and loins and limbs, which gave him the litheness and activity of a panther. Already, as I looked at him, it seemed to me that there was a shadow of tragedy upon his face, a forecast of the day then but a few months distant when a blow from a racquet ball darkened the sight of one eye for ever. Had he stopped there, with his unbeaten career behind him, then indeed the evening of his life might have been as glorious as its dawn. But his proud heart could not permit his title to be torn from him without a struggle. If even now you can read how the gallant fellow, unable with his one eye to judge his distances, fought for thirty-five minutes against his young and formidable opponent, and how, in the bitterness of defeat, he was heard only to express his sorrow for a friend who had backed him with all he possessed, and if you are not touched by the story there must be something wanting in you which should go to the making of a man.

But if there were no men at the tables who could have held their own against Jackson or Jem Belcher, there were

others of a different race and type who had qualities which made them dangerous bruisers. A little way down the room I saw the black face and woolly head of Bill Richmond, in a purple-and-gold footman's livery—destined to be the predecessor of Molineaux, Sutton, and all that line of black boxers who have shown that the muscular power and insensibility to pain which distinguish the African give him a peculiar advantage in the sports of the Ring. He could boast also of the higher honour of having been the first born American to win laurels in the British Ring. There also I saw the keen features of Dan Mendoza, the Jew, just retired from active work, and leaving behind him a reputation for elegance and perfect science which has, to this day, never been exceeded. The worst fault that the critics could find with him was that there was a want of power in his blows—a remark which certainly could not have been made about his neighbour, whose long face, curved nose, and dark, flashing eyes proclaimed him as a member of the same ancient race. This was the formidable Dutch Sam, who fought at nine stone six, and yet possessed such hitting powers, that his admirers, in after years, were willing to back him against the fourteen-stone Tom Cribb, if each were strapped a-straddle to a bench. Half a dozen other sallow Hebrew faces showed how energetically the Jews of Houndsditch and Whitechapel had taken to the sport of the land of their adoption, and that in this, as in more serious fields of human effort, they could hold their own with the best.

It was my neighbour Warr who very good-humouredly pointed out to me all these celebrities, the echoes of whose fame had been wafted down even to our little Sussex village.

"There's Andrew Gamble, the Irish champion," said he. "It was 'e that beat Noah James, the Guardsman, and was afterwards nearly killed by Jem Belcher, in the 'ollow of Wimbledon Common by Abbershaw's gibbet. The two that are next 'im are Irish also, Jack O'Donnell

and Bill Ryan. When you get a good Irishman you can't better 'em, but they're dreadful 'asty. That little cove with the leery face is Caleb Baldwin the Coster, 'im that they call the Pride of Westminster. 'E's but five foot seven, and nine stone five, but 'e's got the 'eart of a giant. 'E's never been beat, and there ain't a man within a stone of 'im that could beat 'im, except only Dutch Sam. There's George Maddox, too, another o' the same breed, and as good a man as ever pulled his coat off. The genelmanly man that eats with a fork, 'im what looks like a Corinthian, only that the bridge of 'is nose ain't quite as it ought to be, that's Dick 'Umphries, the same that was cock of the middle-weights until Mendoza cut his comb for 'im. You see the other with the grey 'ead and the scars on his face ? "

" Why, it's old Tom Faulkner the cricketer ! " cried Harrison, following the line of Bill Warr's stubby fore-finger. " He's the fastest bowler in the Midlands, and at his best there weren't many boxers in England that could stand up against him."

" You're right there, Jack 'Arrison. 'E was one of the three who came up to fight when the best men of Birmingham challenged the best men of London. 'E's an evergreen, is Tom. Why, he was turned five-and-fifty when he challenged and beat, after fifty minutes of it, Jack Thornhill, who was tough enough to take it out of many a youngster. It's better to give odds in weight than in years."

" Youth will be served," said a crooning voice from the other side of the table. " Aye, masters, youth will be served."

The man who had spoken was the most extraordinary of all the many curious figures in the room. He was very, very old, so old that he was past all comparison, and no one by looking at his mummy skin and fishlike eyes could give a guess at his years. A few scanty grey hairs still hung about his yellow scalp. As to his features, they were scarcely human in their disfigurement, for the deep

wrinkles and pouchings of extreme age had been added to a face which had always been grotesquely ugly, and had been crushed and smashed in addition by many a blow. I had noticed this creature at the beginning of the meal, leaning his chest against the edge of the table as if its support was a welcome one, and feebly picking at the food which was placed before him. Gradually, however, as his neighbours plied him with drink, his shoulders grew squarer, his back stiffened, his eyes brightened, and he looked about him, with an air of surprise at first, as if he had no clear recollection of how he came there, and afterwards with an expression of deepening interest, as he listened, with his ear scooped up in his hand, to the conversation around him.

"That's old Buckhorse," whispered Champion Harrison. "He was just the same as that when I joined the Ring twenty years ago. Time was when he was the terror of London."

"'E was so," said Bill Warr. "'E would fight like a stag, and 'e was that 'ard that 'e would let any swell knock 'im down for 'alf-a-crown. 'E 'ad no face to spoil, d'ye see, for 'e was always the ugliest man in England. But 'e's been on the shelf now for near sixty years, and it cost 'im many a beatin' before 'e could understand that 'is strength was slippin' away from 'im."

"Youth will be served, masters," droned the old man, shaking his head miserably.

"Fill up 'is glass," said Warr. "'Ere, Tom, give old Buckhorse a sup o' liptrap. Warm his 'eart for 'im."

The old man poured a glass of neat gin down his shrivelled throat, and the effect upon him was extraordinary. A light glimmered in each of his dull eyes, a tinge of colour came into his wax-like cheeks, and, opening his toothless mouth, he suddenly emitted a peculiar, bell-like and most musical cry. A hoarse roar of laughter from all the company answered it, and flushed faces craned over each other to catch a glimpse of the veteran.

"There's Buckhorse!" they cried. "Buckhorse is comin' round again."

"You can laugh if you vill, masters," he cried, in his Lewkner Lane dialect, holding up his two thin, vein-covered hands. "It von't be long that you'll be able to see my crooks vich 'ave been on Figg's conk, and on Jack Broughton's, and on 'Arry Gray's, and many another good fightin' man that was millin' for a livin' before your fathers could eat pap."

The company laughed again, and encouraged the old man by half-derisive and half-affectionate cries.

"Let 'em 'ave it, Buckhorse! Give it 'em straight! Tell us how the millin' coves did it in your time."

The old gladiator looked round him in great contempt.

"Vy, from vot I see," he cried, in his high, broken treble, "there's some on you that ain't fit to flick a fly from a joint o' meat. You'd make werry good ladies' maids, the most of you, but you took the wrong turnin' ven you came into the Ring."

"Give 'im a wipe over the mouth," said a hoarse voice.

"Joe Berks," said Jackson, "I'd save the hangman the job of breaking your neck if His Royal Highness wasn't in the room."

"That's as it may be, guv'nor," said the half-drunken ruffian, staggering to his feet. "If I've said anything wot isn't genelmanlike——"

"Sit down, Berks!" cried my uncle, with such a tone of command that the fellow collapsed into his chair.

"Vy, vitch of you would look Tom Slack in the face?" piped the old fellow; "or Jack Broughton?—him vot told the old Dook of Cumberland that all he vanted vas to fight the King o' Proosia's guard, day by day, year in, year out, until 'e 'ad worked out the whole regiment of 'em—and the smallest of 'em six foot long. There's not more'n a few of you could 'it a dint in a pat o' butter, and if you gets a smack or two it's all over vith you. Vich among you could get up again after such a vipe as the Eytalian Gondoleery cove gave to Bob Vittaker?"

"What was that, Buckhorse?" cried several voices.

"'E came over 'ere from voreign parts, and 'e was so broad 'e 'ad to come edgewise through the doors. 'E 'ad so, upon my davy! 'E was that strong that wherever 'e 'it the bone had got to go; and when 'e'd cracked a jaw or two it looked as though nothing in the country could stan' against him. So the King 'e sent one of his genelmen down to Figg and he said to him: 'Ere's a cove vot cracks a bone every time 'e lets vly, and it'll be little credit to the Lunnon boys if they lets 'im get avay vithout a vacking.' So Figg he ups, and he says, 'I do not know, master, but he may break one of 'is countrymen's jawbones vid 'is vist, but I'll bring 'im a Cockney lad and 'e shall not be able to break 'is jawbone with a sledge 'ammer.' I was with Figg in Slaughter's coffee-'ouse, as then vas, ven 'e says this to the King's genelman, and I goes so, I does!" Again he emitted the curious bell-like cry, and again the Corinthians and the fighting-men laughed and applauded him.

"His Royal Highness—that is, the Earl of Chester—would be glad to hear the end of your story, Buckhorse," said my uncle, to whom the Prince had been whispering.

"Vell, your R'yal 'Ighness, it vas like this. Ven the day came round, all the volk came to Figg's Amphi-theatre, the same that vos in Tottenham Court, an' Bob Vittaker 'e vos there, and the Eytalian Gondoleery cove 'e vas there, and all the purlitest, genteelest crowd that ever vos, twenty thousand of 'em, all sittin' with their 'eads like purtaties on a barrer, banked right up round the stage, and me there to pick up Bob, d'ye see, and Jack Figg 'imself just for fair play to do vot was right by the cove from voreign parts. They vas packed all round, the folks was, but down through the middle of 'em was a passage just so as the gentry could come through to their seats, and the stage it vas of wood, as the custom then vas, and a man's 'eight above the 'eads of the people. Vell, then, ven Bob was put up opposite this great Eytalian man I says 'Slap 'im in the vind, Bob,' 'cos I could see

vid 'alf an eye that he vas as puffy as a cheesecake; so Bob he goes in, and as he comes the vorriner let 'im 'ave it amazin' on the conk. I 'eard the thump of it, and I kind o' velt somethin' vistle past me, but ven I looked there was the Eytalian a feelin' of 'is muscles in the middle o' the stage, and as to Bob, there vern't no sign of 'im at all no more'n if 'e'd never been."

His audience was riveted by the old prize-fighter's story. "Well," cried a dozen voices, "what then, Buckhorse: 'ad 'e swallowed 'im, or what?"

"Vell, boys, that vas vat *I* wondered, when sudden I seed two legs a-stickin' up out o' the crowd a long vay off, just like these two vingers, d'ye see, and I knewed they vas Bob's legs, seein' that 'e 'ad kind o' yellow small clothes vid blue ribbons—vich blue vas 'is colour—at the knee. So they up-ended 'im, they did, an' they made a lane for 'im an' cheered 'im to give 'im 'eart, though 'e never lacked for that. At virst 'e vas that dazed that 'e didn't know if 'e vas in church or in 'Orsemonger Gaol; but ven I'd bit 'is two ears 'e shook 'isself together. 'Ve'll try it again, Buck,' says 'e. 'The mark!' says I. And 'e vinked all that vas left o' one eye. So the Eytalian 'e lets swing again, but Bob 'e jumps inside an' lets 'im 'ave it plumb square on the meat safe as 'ard as ever the Lord would let 'im put it in."

"Well? Well?"

"Vell, the Eytalian 'e got a touch of the gurgles, an' 'e shut 'imself right up like a two-foot rule. Then 'e pulled 'imself straight, an' 'e gave the most awful Glory Allelujah screech as ever you 'eard. Off 'e jumps from the stage an' down the passage as 'ard as 'is 'oofs would carry 'im. Up jumps the 'ole crowd, and after 'im as 'ard as they could move for laughin'. They vas lyin' in the kennel three deep all down Tottenham Court Road wid their 'ands to their sides just vit to break themselves in two. Vell, ve chased 'im down 'Olburn, an' down Fleet Street, an' down Cheapside, an' past the 'Change, and on all the vay to Voppin', an' we only catched 'im in the

shippin' office, vere 'e vas askin' 'ow soon 'e could get a passage to voreign parts."

There was much laughter and clapping of glasses upon the table at the conclusion of old Buckhorse's story, and I saw the Prince of Wales hand something to the waiter, who brought it round and slipped it into the skinny hand of the veteran, who spat upon it before thrusting it into his pocket. The table had in the meanwhile been cleared, and was now studded with bottles and glasses, while long clay pipes and tobacco-boxes were handed round. My uncle never smoked, thinking that the habit might darken his teeth, but many of the Corinthians, and the Prince amongst the first of them, set the example of lighting up. All restraint had been done away with, and the prize-fighters, flushed with wine, roared across the tables to each other, or shouted their greetings to friends at the other end of the room. The amateurs, falling into the humour of their company, were hardly less noisy, and loudly debated the merits of the different men, criticising their styles of fighting before their faces, and making bets upon the results of future matches.

In the midst of the uproar there was an imperative rap upon the table, and my uncle rose to speak. As he stood with his pale, calm face and fine figure, I had never seen him to greater advantage, for he seemed, with all his elegance, to have a quiet air of domination amongst these fierce fellows, like a huntsman walking carelessly through a springing and yapping pack. He expressed his pleasure at seeing so many good sportsmen under one roof, and acknowledged the honour which had been done both to his guests and himself by the presence there that night of the illustrious personage whom he should refer to as the Earl of Chester. He was sorry that the season prevented him from placing game upon the table, but there was so much sitting round it that it would perhaps be hardly missed (cheers and laughter). The sports of the Ring had, in his opinion, tended to that contempt of pain and of danger which had contributed so much in

the past to the safety of the country, and which might, if what he heard was true, be very quickly needed once more. If an enemy landed upon our shores it was then that, with our small army, we should be forced to fall back upon native valour trained into hardihood by the practice and contemplation of manly sports. In time of peace also the rules of the Ring had been of service in enforcing the principles of fair play, and in turning public opinion against that use of the knife or of the boot which was so common in foreign countries. He begged, therefore, to drink "Success to the Fancy," coupled with the name of John Jackson, who might stand as a type of all that was most admirable in British boxing.

Jackson having replied with a readiness which many a public man might have envied, my uncle rose once more.

"We are here to-night," said he, "not only to celebrate the past glories of the prize-ring, but also to arrange some sport for the future. It should be easy, now that backers and fighting-men are gathered together under one roof, to come to terms with each other. I have myself set an example by making a match with Sir Lothian Hume, the terms of which will be communicated to you by that gentleman."

Sir Lothian rose with a paper in his hand.

"The terms, your Royal Highness and gentlemen, are briefly these," said he. "My man, Crab Wilson, of Gloucester, having never yet fought a prize battle, is prepared to meet, upon May the 18th of this year, any man of any weight who may be selected by Sir Charles Tregellis. Sir Charles Tregellis's selection is limited to men below twenty or above thirty-five years of age, so as to exclude Belcher and the other candidates for championship honours. The stakes are two thousand pounds against a thousand, two hundred to be paid by the winner to his man; play or pay."

It was curious to see the intense gravity of them all, fighters and backers, as they bent their brows and weighed the conditions of the match.

"I am informed," said Sir John Lade, "that Crab Wilson's age is twenty-three, and that, although he has never fought a regular P.R. battle, he has none the less fought within ropes for a stake on many occasions."

"I've seen him half a dozen times at the least," said Belcher.

"It is precisely for that reason, Sir John, that I am laying odds of two to one in his favour."

"May I ask," said the Prince, "what the exact height and weight of Wilson may be?"

"Five foot eleven and thirteen-ten, your Royal Highness."

"Long enough and heavy enough for anything on two legs," said Jackson, and the professionals all murmured their assent.

"Read the rules of the fight, Sir Lothian."

"The battle to take place on Tuesday, May the 18th, at the hour of ten in the morning, at a spot to be afterwards named. The ring to be twenty-foot square. Neither to fall without a knock-down blow, subject to the decision of the umpires. Three umpires to be chosen upon the ground, namely, two in ordinary and one in reference. Does that meet your wishes, Sir Charles?"

My uncle bowed.

"Have you anything to say, Wilson?"

The young pugilist, who had a curious, lanky figure, and a craggy, bony face, passed his fingers through his close-cropped hair.

"If you please, zir," said he, with a slight west-country burr, "a twenty-voot ring is too small for a thirteen-stone man."

There was another murmur of professional agreement.

"What would you have it, Wilson?"

"Vour-an'-twenty, Sir Lothian."

"Have you any objection, Sir Charles?"

"Not the slightest."

"Anything else, Wilson?"

"If you please, zir, I'd like to know whom I'm vighting with."

"I understand that you have not publicly nominated your man, Sir Charles?"

"I do not intend to do so until the very morning of the fight. I believe I have that right within the terms of our wager."

"Certainly, if you choose to exercise it."

"I do so intend. And I should be vastly pleased if Mr. Berkeley Craven will consent to be stake-holder."

That gentleman having willingly given his consent, the final formalities which led up to these humble tournaments were concluded.

And then, as these full-blooded, powerful men became heated with their wine, angry eyes began to glare across the table, and amid the grey swirls of tobacco-smoke the lamp-light gleamed upon the fierce, hawklike Jews, and the flushed, savage Saxons. The old quarrel as to whether Jackson had or had not committed a foul by seizing Mendoza by the hair on the occasion of their battle at Hornchurch, eight years before, came to the front once more. Dutch Sam hurled a shilling down upon the table, and offered to fight the Pride of Westminster for it if he ventured to say that Mendoza had been fairly beaten. Joe Berks, who had grown noisier and more quarrelsome as the evening went on, tried to clamber across the table, with horrible blasphemies, to come to blows with an old Jew named Fighting Yussef, who had plunged into the discussion. It needed very little more to finish the supper by a general and ferocious battle, and it was only the exertions of Jackson, Belcher, Harrison and others of the cooler and steadier men, which saved us from a riot.

And then, when at last this question was set aside, that of the rival claims to championships at different weights came on in its stead, and again angry words flew about and challenges were in the air. There was no exact limit between the light, middle and heavy-weights, and yet it would make a very great difference to the standing of a

boxer whether he should be regarded as the heaviest of the light-weights, or the lightest of the heavy-weights. One claimed to be ten-stone champion, another was ready to take on anything at eleven, but would not run to twelve, which would have brought the invincible Jem Belcher down upon him. Faulkner claimed to be champion of the seniors, and even old Buckhorse's curious call rang out above the tumult as he turned the whole company to laughter and good humour again by challenging anything over eighty and under seven stone.

But in spite of gleams of sunshine, there was thunder in the air, and Champion Harrison had just whispered in my ear that he was quite sure that we should never get through the night without trouble, and was advising me, if it got very bad, to take refuge under the table, when the landlord entered the room hurriedly and handed a note to my uncle.

He read it, and then passed it to the Prince, who returned it with raised eyebrows and a gesture of surprise. Then my uncle rose with the scrap of paper in his hand and a smile upon his lips.

"Gentlemen," said he, "there is a stranger waiting below who desires a fight to a finish with the best man in the room.".

II. *The Fight in the Coach-house*

THE curt announcement was followed by a moment of silent surprise, and then by a general shout of laughter. There might be argument as to who was champion at each weight; but there could be no question that all the champions of all the weights were seated round the tables. An audacious challenge which embraced them one and all, without regard to size or age, could hardly be regarded otherwise than as a joke—but it was a joke which might be a dear one for the joker.

"Is this genuine?" asked my uncle.

"Yes, Sir Charles," answered the landlord; "the man is waiting below."

"It's a kid!" cried several of the fighting-men. "Some cove is a-gammonin' us."

"Don't you believe it," answered the landlord. "He's a real slap-up Corinthian, by his dress; and he means what he says, or else I ain't no judge of a man."

My uncle whispered for a few moments with the Prince of Wales. "Well, gentlemen," said he, at last, "the night is still young, and if any of you should wish to show the company a little of your skill, you could not ask a better opportunity."

"What weight is he, Bill?" asked Jem Belcher.

"He's close on six foot, and I should put him well into the thirteen stones when he's buffed."

"Heavy metal!" cried Jackson. "Who takes him on?"

They all wanted to, from nine-stone Dutch Sam upwards. The air was filled with their hoarse shouts and their arguments why each should be the chosen one. To fight when they were flushed with wine and ripe for mischief—above all, to fight before so select a company with the Prince at the ringside, was a chance which did not often come in their way. Only Jackson, Belcher, Mendoza and one or two others of the senior and more famous men remained silent, thinking it beneath their dignity that they should condescend to so irregular a bye-battle.

"Well, you can't all fight him," remarked Jackson, when the babel had died away. "It's for the chairman to choose."

"Perhaps your Royal Highness has a preference," said my uncle.

"By Jove, I'd take him on myself if my position was different," said the Prince, whose face was growing redder and his eyes more glazed. "You've seen me with the mufflers, Jackson! You know my form!"

"I've seen your Royal Highness, and I have felt your Royal Highness," said the courtly Jackson.

"Perhaps Jem Belcher would give us an exhibition," said my uncle.

Belcher smiled and shook his handsome head.

"There's my brother Tom here has never been blooded in London yet, sir. He might make a fairer match of it."

"Give him over to me!" roared Joe Berks. "I've been waitin' for a turn all evenin', an' I'll fight any man that tries to take my place. 'E's my meat, my masters. Leave 'im to me if you want to see 'ow a calf's 'ead should be dressed. If you put Tom Belcher before me I'll fight Tom Belcher, an' for that matter I'll fight Jem Belcher, or Bill Belcher, or any other Belcher that ever came out of Bristol."

It was clear that Berks had got to the stage when he must fight someone. His heavy face was gorged and the veins stood out on his low forehead, while his fierce grey eyes looked viciously from man to man in quest of a quarrel. His great red hands were bunched into huge, gnarled fists, and he shook one of them menacingly as his drunken gaze swept round the tables.

"I think you'll agree with me, gentlemen, that Joe Berks would be all the better for some fresh air and exercise," said my uncle. "With the concurrence of His Royal Highness and of the company, I shall select him as our champion on this occasion."

"You do me proud," cried the fellow, staggering to his feet and pulling at his coat. "If I don't glut him within the five minutes, may I never see Shropshire again."

"Wait a bit, Berks," cried several of the amateurs. "Where's it going to be held?"

"Where you like, masters. I'll fight him in a sawpit, or on the outside of a coach if it please you. Put us toe to toe, and leave the rest with me."

"They can't fight here with all this litter," said my uncle. "Where shall it be?"

"'Pon my soul, Tregellis," cried the Prince, "I think our unknown friend might have a word to say upon that

matter. He'll be vastly ill-used if you don't let him have his own choice of conditions."

"You are right, sir. We must have him up."

"That's easy enough," said the landlord, "for here he comes through the doorway."

I glanced round and had a side view of a tall and well-dressed young man in a long, brown travelling coat and a black felt hat. The next instant he had turned and I had clutched with both my hands on to Champion Harrison's arm.

"Harrison!" I gasped. "It's Boy Jim!"

And yet somehow the possibility and even the probability of it had occurred to me from the beginning, and I believe that it had to Harrison also, for I had noticed that his face grew grave and troubled from the very moment that there was talk of the stranger below. Now, the instant that the buzz of surprise and admiration caused by Jim's face and figure had died away, Harrison was on his feet, gesticulating in his excitement.

"It's my nephew Jim, gentlemen," he cried. "He's not twenty yet, and it's no doing of mine that he should be here."

"Let him alone, Harrison," cried Jackson. "He's big enough to take care of himself."

"This matter has gone rather far," said my uncle. "I think, Harrison, that you are too good a sportsman to prevent your nephew from showing whether he takes after his uncle."

"It's very different from me," cried Harrison, in great distress. "But I'll tell you what I'll do, gentlemen. I never thought to stand up in a ring again, but I'll take on Joe Berks with pleasure, just to give a bit o' sport to this company."

Boy Jim stepped across and laid his hand upon the prize-fighter's shoulder.

"It must be so, uncle," I heard him whisper. "I am sorry to go against your wishes, but I have made up my mind, and I must carry it through."

Harrison shrugged his huge shoulders.

"Jim, Jim, you don't know what you are doing! But I've heard you speak like that before, boy, and I know that it ends in your getting your way."

"I trust, Harrison, that your opposition is withdrawn?" said my uncle.

"Can I not take his place?"

"You would not have it said that I gave a challenge and let another carry it out?" whispered Jim. "This is my one chance. For Heaven's sake don't stand in my way."

The smith's broad and usually stolid face was all working with his conflicting emotions. At last he banged his fist down upon the table.

"It's no fault of mine!" he cried. "It was to be and it is. Jim, boy, for the Lord's sake remember your distances, and stick to out-fightin' with a man that could give you a stone."

"I was sure that Harrison would not stand in the way of sport," said my uncle. "We are glad that you have stepped up, that we might consult you as to the arrangements for giving effect to your very sporting challenge."

"Whom am I to fight?" asked Jim, looking round at the company, who were now all upon their feet.

"Yourng man, you'll know enough of who you 'ave to fight before you are through with it," cried Berks, lurching heavily through the crowd. "You'll need a friend to swear to you before I've finished, dy'e see?"

Jim looked at him with disgust in every line of his face.

"Surely you are not going to set me to fight a drunken man?" said he. "Where is Jem Belcher?"

"My name, young man."

"I should be glad to try you, if I may."

"You must work up to me, my lad. You don't take a ladder at one jump, but you do it rung by rung. Show yourself to be a match for me, and I'll give you a turn."

"I'm much obliged to you."

"And I like the look of you, and wish you well," said Belcher, holding out his hand. They were not unlike

each other, either in face or figure, though the Bristol man was a few years the older, and a murmur of critical admiration was heard as the two tall, lithe figures, and keen, clean-cut faces were contrasted.

"Have you any choice where the fight takes place?" asked my uncle.

"I am in your hands, sir," said Jim.

"Why not go round to the Fives Court?" suggested Sir John Lade.

"Yes, let us go to the Fives Court."

But this did not at all suit the views of the landlord, who saw in this lucky incident a chance of reaping a fresh harvest from his spendthrift company.

"If it please you," he cried, "there is no need to go so far. My coach-house at the back of the yard is empty, and a better place for a mill you'll never find."

There was a general shout in favour of the coach-house, and those who were nearest the door began to slip through, in the hope of securing the best places. My stout neighbour, Bill Warr, pulled Harrison to one side.

"I'd stop it, if I were you," he whispered.

"I would if I could. It's no wish of mine that he should fight. But there's no turning him when once his mind is made up." All his own fights put together had never reduced the pugilist to such a state of agitation.

"Wait on 'im yourself, then, and chuck up the sponge when things begin to go wrong. You know Joe Berks's record?"

"He's since my time."

"Well, 'e's a terror, that's all. It's only Belcher that can master 'im. You see the man for yourself, six foot, fourteen stone, and full of the devil. Belcher's beat 'im twice, but the second time 'e 'ad all 'is work to do it."

"Well, well, we've got to go through with it. You've not seen Boy Jim put his mawleys up, or maybe you'd think better of his chances. When he was short of sixteen he licked the Cock of the South Downs, and he's come on a long way since then."

The company was swarming through the door, and clattering down the stair, so we followed in the stream. A fine rain was falling, and the yellow lights from the windows glistened upon the wet cobblestones of the yard. How welcome was that breath of sweet, damp air after the fetid atmosphere of the supper-room. At the other end of the yard was an open door sharply outlined by the gleam of lanterns within, and through this they poured, amateurs and fighting-men jostling each other in their eagerness to get to the front. For my own part, being a smallish man, I should have seen nothing had I not found an upturned bucket in a corner, upon which I perched myself with the wall at my back.

It was a large room with a wooden floor and an open square in the ceiling, which was fringed with the heads of the ostlers and stable boys who were looking down from the harness-room above. A carriage-lamp was slung in each corner, and a very large stable-lantern hung from a rafter in the centre. A coil of rope had been brought in, and under the direction of Jackson four men had been stationed to hold it.

"What space do you give them?" asked my uncle.

"Twenty-four, as they are both big ones, sir."

"Very good, and half-minutes between rounds, I suppose? I'll umpire if Sir Lothian Hume will do the same, and you can hold the watch and referee, Jackson."

With great speed and exactness every preparation was rapidly made by these experienced men. Mendoza and Dutch Sam were commissioned to attend to Berks, while Belcher and Jack Harrison did the same for Boy Jim. Sponges, towels and some brandy in a bladder were passed over the heads of the crowd for the use of the seconds.

"Here's our man," cried Belcher. "Come along, Berks, or we'll go to fetch you."

Jim appeared in the ring stripped to the waist, with a coloured handkerchief tied round his middle. A shout of admiration came from the spectators as they looked upon the fine lines of his figure, and I found myself roaring

with the rest. His shoulders were sloping rather than bulky, and his chest was deep rather than broad, but the muscle was all in the right place, rippling down in long, low curves from neck to shoulder, and from shoulder to elbow. His work at the anvil had developed his arms to their utmost, and his healthy country living gave a sleek gloss to his ivory skin, which shone in the lamplight. His expression was full of spirit and confidence, and he wore a grim sort of half-smile which I had seen many a time in our boyhood, and which meant, I knew, that his pride had set iron hard, and that his senses would fail him long before his courage.

Joe Berks in the meanwhile had swaggered in and stood with folded arms between his seconds in the opposite corner. His face had none of the eager alertness of his opponent, and his skin, of a dead white, with heavy folds about the chest and ribs, showed, even to my inexperienced eyes, that he was not a man who should fight without training. A life of toping and ease had left him flabby and gross. On the other hand, he was famous for his mettle and for his hitting power, so that, even in the face of the advantages of youth and condition, the betting was three to one in his favour. His heavy-jowled, clean-shaven face expressed ferocity as well as courage, and he stood with his small, blood-shot eyes fixed viciously upon Jim, and his lumpy shoulders stooping a little forwards, like a fierce hound straining on a leash.

The hubbub of the betting had risen until it drowned all other sounds, men shouting their opinions from one side of the coach-house to the other, and waving their hands to attract attention, or as a sign that they had accepted a wager. Sir John Lade, standing just in front of me, was roaring out the odds against Jim, and laying them freely with those who fancied the appearance of the unknown.

"I've seen Berks fight," said he to the Honourable Berkeley Craven. "No country hawbuck is going to knock out a man with such a record."

"He may be a country hawbuck," the other answered, "but I have been reckoned a judge of anything either on two legs or four, and I tell you, Sir John, that I never saw a man who looked better bred in my life. Are you still laying against him?"

"Three to one."

"Have you once in hundreds."

"Very good, Craven! There they go! Berks! Berks! Bravo! Berks! Bravo! I think, Craven, that I shall trouble you for that hundred."

The two men had stood up to each other, Jim as light upon his feet as a goat, with his left well out and his right thrown across the lower part of his chest, while Berks held both arms half extended and his feet almost level, so that he might lead off with either side. For an instant they looked each other over, and then Berks, ducking his head and rushing in with a hand-over-hand style of hitting, bored Jim down into his corner. It was a backward slip rather than a knock-down, but a thin trickle of blood was seen at the corner of Jim's mouth. In an instant the seconds had seized their men and carried them back into their corners.

"Do you mind doubling our bets?" said Berkeley Craven, who was craning his neck to get a glimpse of Jim.

"Four to one on Berks! Four to one on Berks!" cried the ringsiders.

"The odds have gone up, you see. Will you have four to one in hundreds?"

"Very good, Sir John."

"You seem to fancy him more for having been knocked down."

"He was pushed down, but he stopped every blow, and I liked the look on his face as he got up again."

"Well, it's the old stager for me. Here they come again! He's got a pretty style, and he covers his points well, but it isn't the best looking that wins."

They were at it again, and I was jumping about upon my bucket in my excitement. It was evident that Berks

meant to finish the battle off-hand, whilst Jim, with two of the most experienced men in England to advise him, was quite aware that his correct tactics were to allow the ruffian to expend his strength and wind in vain. There was something horrible in the ferocious energy of Berks's hitting, every blow fetching a grunt from him as he smashed it in, and after each I gazed at Jim, as I have gazed at a stranded vessel upon the Sussex beach, when wave after wave has roared over it, fearing each time that I should find it miserably mangled. But still the lamp-light shone upon the lad's clear, alert face, upon his well-opened eyes and his firm-set mouth, while the blows were taken upon his forearm or allowed, by a quick duck of the head, to whistle over his shoulder. But Berks was artful as well as violent. Gradually he worked Jim back into an angle of the ropes from which there was no escape, and then, when he had him fairly penned, he sprang upon him like a tiger. What happened was so quick that I cannot set its sequence down in words, but I saw Jim make a quick stoop under the swinging arms, and at the same instant I heard a sharp, ringing smack, and there was Jim dancing about in the middle of the ring, and Berks lying upon his side on the floor, with his hand to his eye.

How they roared! Prize-fighters, Corinthians, Prince, stable-boy and landlord were all shouting at the top of their lungs. Old Buckhorse was skipping about on a box beside me, shrieking out criticisms and advice in strange, obsolete ring-jargon, which no one could understand. His dull eyes were shining, his parchment face was quivering with excitement, and his strange musical call rang out above all the hubbub. The two men were hurried to their corners, one second sponging them down and the other flapping a towel in front of their faces, whilst they, with arms hanging down and legs extended, tried to draw all the air they could into their lungs in the brief space allowed them.

"Where's your country hawbuck now?" cried

Craven, triumphantly. " Did ever you witness anything more masterly ? "

" He's no Johnny Raw, certainly," said Sir John, shaking his head. " What odds are you giving on Berks, Lord Sele ? "

" Two to one."

" I take you twice in hundreds."

" Here's Sir John Lade hedging ! " cried my uncle, smiling back at us over his shoulder.

" Time ! " said Jackson, and the two men sprang forward to the mark again.

This round was a good deal shorter than that which had preceded it. Berks's orders evidently were to close at any cost, and so make use of his extra weight and strength before the superior condition of his antagonist could have time to tell. On the other hand, Jim, after his experience in the last round, was less disposed to make any great exertion to keep him at arms' length. He led at Berks's head, as he came rushing in, and missed him, receiving a severe body blow in return, which left the imprint of four angry knuckles above his ribs. As they closed Jim caught his opponent's bullet head under his arm for an instant, and put a couple of half-arm blows in ; but the prize-fighter pulled him over by his weight, and the two fell panting side by side upon the ground. Jim sprang up, however, and walked over to his corner, while Berks, distressed by his evening's dissipation, leaned one arm upon Mendoza and the other upon Dutch Sam as he made for his seat.

" Bellows to mend ! " cried Jem Belcher. " Where's the four to one now ? "

" Give us time to get the lid off our pepper-box," said Mendoza. " We mean to make a night of it."

" Looks like it," said Jack Harrison. " He's shut one of his eyes already. Even money that my boy wins it ! "

" How much ? " asked several voices.

" Two pound four and threepence," cried Harrison, counting out all his worldly wealth.

"Time!" said Jackson once more.

They were both at the mark in an instant, Jim as full of sprightly confidence as ever, and Berks with a fixed grin upon his bull-dog face and a most vicious gleam in the only eye which was of use to him. His half-minute had not enabled him to recover his breath, and his huge hairy chest was rising and falling with a quick, loud panting like a spent hound. "Go in, boy! Bustle him!" roared Harrison and Belcher. "Get your wind, Joe; get your wind!" cried the Jews. So now we had a reversal of tactics, for it was Jim who went in to hit with all the vigour of his young strength and unimpaired energy, while it was the savage Berks who was paying his debt to Nature for the many injuries which he had done her. He gasped, he gurgled, his face grew purple in his attempts to get his breath, while with his long left arm extended and his right thrown across, he tried to screen himself from the attack of his wiry antagonist. "Drop when he hits!" cried Mendoza. "Drop and have a rest!"

But there was no shyness or shiftiness about Berks's fighting. He was always a gallant ruffian, who disdained to go down before an antagonist as long as his legs would sustain him. He propped Jim off with his long arm, and though the lad sprang lightly round him looking for an opening, he was held off as if a forty-inch bar of iron were between them. Every instant now was in favour of Berks, and already his breathing was easier and the bluish tinge fading from his face. Jim knew that his chance of a speedy victory was slipping away from him, and he came back again and again as swift as a flash to the attack without being able to get past the passive defence of the trained fighting-man. It was at such a moment that ringcraft was needed, and luckily for Jim two masters of it were at his back.

"Get your left on his mark, boy," they shouted, "then go to his head with the right."

Jim heard and acted on the instant. Plunk! came his

left just where his antagonist's ribs curved from his breast-bone. The force of the blow was half broken by Berks's elbow, but it served its purpose of bringing forward his head. Spank ! went the right, with the clear, crisp sound of two billiard balls clapping together, and Berks reeled, flung up his arms, spun round, and fell in a huge, fleshy heap upon the floor. His seconds were on him instantly, and propped him up in a sitting position, his head rolling helplessly from one shoulder to the other, and finally toppling backwards with his chin pointed to the ceiling. Dutch Sam thrust the brandy-bladder between his teeth, while Mendoza shook him savagely and howled insults in his ear, but neither the spirits nor the sense of injury could break into that serene insensibility. " Time ! " was duly called, and the Jews, seeing that the affair was over, let their man's head fall back with a crack upon the floor, and there he lay, his huge arms and legs asprawl, whilst the Corinthians and fighting-men crowded past him to shake the hand of his conqueror.

For my part, I tried also to press through the throng, but it was no easy task for one of the smallest and weakest men in the room. On all sides of me I heard a brisk discussion from amateurs and professionals of Jim's performance and of his prospects.

" He's the best bit of new stuff that I've seen since Jem Belcher fought his first fight with Paddington Jones at Wormwood Scrubbs four years ago last April," said Berkeley Craven. " You'll see him with the belt round his waist before he's five-and-twenty, or I am no judge of a man."

" That handsome face of his has cost me a cool five hundred," grumbled Sir John Lade. " Who'd have thought he was such a punishing hitter ? "

" For all that," said another, " I am confident that if Joe Berks had been sober he would have beaten him. Besides, the lad was in training, and the other would burst like an overdone potato if he were hit. I never saw a man so soft, or with his wind in such condition.

Put the men in training, and it's a horse to a hen on the bruiser."

Some agreed with the last speaker and some were against him, so that a brisk argument was being carried on around me. In the midst of it the Prince took his departure, which was the signal for the greater part of the company to make for the door. In this way I was able at last to reach the corner where Jim had just finished his dressing, while Champion Harrison, with tears of joy still shining upon his cheeks, was helping him on with his overcoat.

" In four rounds ! " he kept repeating in a sort of an ecstasy. " Joe Berks in four rounds ! And it took Jem Belcher fourteen ! "

" Well, Roddy," cried Jim, holding out his hand, " I told you that I would come to London and make my name known."

" It was splendid, Jim ! "

" Dear old Roddy ! I saw your white face staring at me from the corner. You are not changed, for all your grand clothes and your London friends."

" It is you who are changed, Jim," said I ; " I hardly knew you when you came into the room."

" Nor I," cried the smith. " Where got you all these fine feathers, Jim ? Sure I am that it was not your aunt who helped you to the first step towards the prize-ring."

" Miss Hinton has been my friend—the best friend I ever had."

" Humph ! I thought as much," grumbled the smith. " Well, it is no doing of mine, Jim, and you must bear witness to that when we go home again. I don't know what—but, there, it is done, and it can't be helped. After all, she's—— Now, the deuce take my clumsy tongue ! "

I could not tell whether it was the wine which he had taken at supper or the excitement of Boy Jim's victory which was affecting Harrison, but his usually placid face wore a most disturbed expression, and his manner

seemed to betray an alternation of exultation and embarrassment. Jim looked curiously at him, wondering evidently what it was that lay behind these abrupt sentences and sudden silences. The coach-house had in the meantime been cleared ; Berks with many curses had staggered at last to his feet, and had gone off in company with two other bruisers, while Jem Belcher alone remained chatting very earnestly with my uncle.

" Very good, Belcher," I heard my uncle say.

" It would be a real pleasure to me to do it, sir," said the famous prize-fighter, as the two walked towards us.

" I wished to ask you, Jim Harrison, whether you would undertake to be my champion in the fight against Crab Wilson of Gloucester ? " said my uncle.

" That is what I want, Sir Charles—to have a chance of fighting my way upwards."

" There are heavy stakes upon the event—very heavy stakes," said my uncle. " You will receive two hundred pounds, if you win. Does that satisfy you ? "

" I shall fight for the honour, and because I wish to be thought worthy of being matched against Jem Belcher."

Belcher laughed good-humouredly.

" You are going the right way about it, lad," said he. " But you had a soft thing on to-night with a drunken man who was out of condition."

" I did not wish to fight him," said Jim, flushing.

" Oh, I know you have spirit enough to fight anything on two legs. I knew that the instant I clapped eyes on you ; but I want you to remember that when you fight Crab Wilson, you will fight the most promising man from the west, and that the best man of the west is likely to be the best man in England. He's as quick and as long in the reach as you are, and he'll train himself to the last half-ounce of tallow. I tell you this now, d'ye see, because if I'm to have the charge of you——"

" Charge of me ! "

" Yes," said my uncle. " Belcher has consented to train you for the coming battle if you are willing to enter."

"I am sure I am very much obliged to you," cried Jim, heartily. "Unless my uncle should wish to train me, there is no one I would rather have."

"Nay, Jim; I'll stay with you a few days, but Belcher knows a deal more about training than I do. Where will the quarters be?"

"I thought it would be handy for you if we fixed it at the George, at Crawley. Then, if we have choice of place, we might choose Crawley Down, for, except Molesey Hurst, and, maybe, Smitham Bottom, there isn't a spot in the country that would compare with it for a mill. Do you agree with that?"

"With all my heart," said Jim.

"Then you're my man from this hour on, d'ye see?" said Belcher. "Your food is mine, and your drink is mine, and your sleep is mine, and all you've to do is just what you are told. We haven't an hour to lose, for Wilson has been in half-training this month back. You saw his empty glass to-night."

"Jim's fit to fight for his life at the present moment," said Harrison. "But we'll both come down to Crawley to-morrow. So good night, Sir Charles."

"Good night, Roddy," said Jim. "You'll come down to Crawley and see me at my training quarters, will you not?"

And I heartily promised that I would.

"You must be more careful, nephew," said my uncle, as we rattled home in his model *vis-à-vis*. "*En première jeunesse* one is a little inclined to be ruled by one's heart rather than by one's reason. Jim Harrison seems to be a most respectable young fellow, but after all he is a blacksmith's apprentice, and a candidate for the prize-ring. There is a vast gap between his position and that of my own blood relation, and you must let him feel that you are his superior."

"He is the oldest and dearest friend that I have in the world, sir," I answered. "We were boys together, and have never had a secret from each other. As to showing

him that I am his superior, I don't know how I can do that, for I know very well that he is mine."

"Hum!" said my uncle, drily, and it was the last word that he addressed to me that night.

12. *The Coffee-room of Fladong's*

SO Boy Jim went down to the George, at Crawley, under the charge of Jem Belcher and Champion Harrison, to train for his great fight with Crab Wilson, of Gloucester, whilst every club and bar parlour of London rang with the account of how he had appeared at a supper of Corinthians, and beaten the formidable Joe Berks in four rounds. I remembered that afternoon at Friar's Oak when Jim had told me that he would make his name known, and his words had come true sooner than he could have expected it, for, go where one might, one heard of nothing but the match between Sir Lothian Hume and Sir Charles Tregellis, and the points of the two probable combatants. The betting was still steadily in favour of Wilson, for he had a number of bye-battles to set against this single victory of Jim's, and it was thought by connoisseurs who had seen him spar that the singular defensive tactics which had given him his nickname would prove very puzzling to a raw antagonist. In height, strength and reputation for gameness there was very little to choose between them, but Wilson had been the more severely tested.

It was but a few days before the battle that my father made his promised visit to London. The seaman had no love of cities, and was happier wandering over the Downs, and turning his glass upon every topsail which showed above the horizon, than when finding his way among crowded streets, where, as he complained, it was impossible to keep a course by the sun, and hard enough by dead reckoning. Rumours of war were in the air, however, and it was necessary that he should use his

influence with Lord Nelson if a vacancy were to be found either for himself or for me.

My uncle had just set forth, as was his custom of an evening, clad in his green riding-frock, his plate buttons, his Cordovan boots and his round hat, to show himself upon his crop-tailed tit in the Mall. I had remained behind, for, indeed, I had already made up my mind that I had no calling for this fashionable life. These men, with their small waists, their gestures and their unnatural ways, had become wearisome to me, and even my uncle, with his cold and patronising manner, filled me with very mixed feelings. My thoughts were back in Sussex, and I was dreaming of the kindly, simple ways of the country, when there came a rat-tat at the knocker, the ring of a hearty voice, and there, in the doorway, was the smiling, weather-beaten face, with the puckered eyelids and the light blue eyes.

"Why, Roddy, you are grand indeed!" he cried. "But I had rather see you with the King's blue coat upon your back than with all these frills and ruffles."

"And I had rather wear it, father."

"It warms my heart to hear you say so. Lord Nelson has promised me that he would find a berth for you, and to-morrow we shall seek him out and remind him of it. But where is your uncle?"

"He is riding in the Mall."

A look of relief passed over my father's honest face, for he was never very easy in his brother-in-law's company. "I have been to the Admiralty," said he, "and I trust that I shall have a ship when war breaks out; by all accounts it will not be long first. Lord St. Vincent told me so with his own lips. But I am at Fladong's, Rodney, where, if you will come and sup with me, you will see some of my messmates from the Mediterranean."

When you think that in the last year of the war we had 140,000 seamen and mariners afloat, commanded by 4,000 officers, and that half of these had been turned adrift when the Peace of Amiens laid their ships up in

the Hamoaze or Portsdown creek, you will understand that London, as well as the dockyard towns, was full of seafarers. You could not walk the streets without catching sight of the gipsy-faced, keen-eyed men whose plain clothes told of their thin purses as plainly as their listless air showed their weariness of a life of forced and unaccustomed inaction. Amid the dark streets and brick houses there was something out of place in their appearance, as when the sea-gulls, driven by stress of weather, are seen in the Midland shires. Yet while prize-courts procrastinated, or there was a chance of an appointment by showing their sunburned faces at the Admiralty, so long they would continue to pace with their quarter-deck strut down Whitehall, or to gather of an evening to discuss the events of the last war or chances of the next at Fladong's, in Oxford Street, which was reserved as entirely for the Navy as Slaughter's was for the Army, or Ibbetson's for the Church of England.

It did not surprise me, therefore, that we should find the large room in which we supped crowded with naval men, but I remember that what did cause me some astonishment was to observe that all these sailors, who had served under the most varying conditions in all quarters of the globe, from the Baltic to the East Indies, should have been moulded into so uniform a type that they were more like each other than brother is commonly to brother. The rules of the service ensured that every face should be clean-shaven, every head powdered, and every neck covered by the little queue of natural hair tied with a black silk ribbon. Biting winds and tropical suns had combined to darken them, whilst the habit of command and the menace of ever-recurring dangers had stamped them all with the same expression of authority and of alertness. There were some jovial faces amongst them, but the older officers, with their deep-lined cheeks and their masterful noses, were, for the most part, as austere as so many weather-beaten ascetics from the desert. Lonely watches, and a discipline which cut them

off from all companionship, had left their mark upon those Red Indian faces. For my part, I could hardly eat my supper for watching them. Young as I was, I knew that if there were any freedom left in Europe it was to these men that we owed it; and I seemed to read upon their grim, harsh features the record of that long ten years of struggle which had swept the tricolour from the seas.

When we had finished our supper, my father led me into the great coffee-room, where a hundred or more officers may have been assembled, drinking their wine and smoking their long clay pipes, until the air was as thick as the main-deck in a close-fought action. As we entered we found ourselves face to face with an elderly officer who was coming out. He was a man with large, thoughtful eyes, and a full, placid face—such a face as one would expect from a philosopher and a philanthropist rather than from a fighting seaman.

"Here's Cuddie Collingwood," whispered my father.

"Halloa, Lieutenant Stone!" cried the famous admiral very cheerily. "I have scarce caught a glimpse of you since you came aboard the *Excellent* after St. Vincent. You had the luck to be at the Nile also, I understand?"

"I was third of the *Theseus*, under Miller, sir."

"It nearly broke my heart to have missed it. I have not yet outlived it. To think of such a gallant service, and I engaged in harassing the market-boats, the miserable cabbage-carriers of St. Luccars!"

"Your plight was better than mine, Sir Cuthbert," said a voice from behind us, and a large man in the full uniform of a post-captain took a step forward to include himself in our circle. His mastiff face was heavy with emotion, and he shook his head miserably as he spoke.

"Yes, yes, Troubridge, I can understand and sympathise with your feelings."

"I passed through torment that night, Collingwood. It left a mark on me that I shall never lose until I go over the ship's side in a canvas cover. To have my beautiful *Culloden* laid on a sandbank just out of gunshot. To

hear and see the fight the whole night through, and never to pull a lanyard or take the tompions out of my guns. Twice I opened my pistol-case to blow out my brains, and it was but the thought that Nelson might have a use for me that held me back."

Collingwood shook the hand of the unfortunate captain.

" Admiral Nelson was not long in finding a use for you, Troubridge," said he. " We have all heard of your siege of Capua, and how you ran up your ship's guns without trenches or parallels, and fired point-blank through the embrasures."

The melancholy cleared away from the massive face of the big seaman, and his deep laughter filled the room.

" I'm not clever enough or slow enough for their Z-Z fashions," said he. " We got alongside and slapped it in through their port-holes until they struck their colours. But where have you been, Sir Cuthbert ? "

" With my wife and my two little lasses at Morpeth in the North Country. I have but seen them this once in ten years, and it may be ten more, for all I know, ere I see them again. I have been doing good work for the fleet up yonder."

" I had thought, sir, that it was inland," said my father.

Collingwood took a little black bag out of his pocket and shook it.

" Inland it is," said he, " and yet I have done good work for the fleet there. What do you suppose I hold in this bag ? "

" Bullets," said Troubridge.

" Something that a sailor needs even more than that," answered the admiral, and turning it over he tilted a pile of acorns on to his palm. " I carry them with me in my country walks, and where I see a fruitful nook I thrust one deep with the end of my cane. My oak trees may fight those rascals over the water when I am long forgotten. Do you know, lieutenant, how many oaks go to make an eighty-gun ship ? "

My father shook his head.

"Two thousand, no less. For every two-decked ship that carries the white ensign there is a grove the less in England. So how are our grandsons to beat the French if we do not give them the trees with which to build their ships?"

He replaced his bag in his pocket, and then, passing his arm through Troubridge's, they went through the door together.

"There's a man whose life might help you to trim your own course," said my father, as we took our seats at a vacant table. "He is ever the same quiet gentleman, with his thoughts busy for the comfort of his ship's company, and his heart with his wife and children whom he has so seldom seen. It is said in the fleet that an oath has never passed his lips, Rodney, though how he managed when he was first lieutenant of a raw crew is more than I can conceive. But they all love Cuddie, for they know he's an angel to fight. How d'ye do, Captain Foley? My respects, Sir Ed'ard! Why, if they could but press the company, they would man a corvette with flag officers.

"There's many a man here, Rodney," continued my father, as he glanced about him, "whose name may never find its way into any book save his own ship's log, but who in his own way has set as fine an example as any admiral of them all. We know them, and talk of them in the fleet, though they may never be bawled in the streets of London. There's as much seamanship and pluck in a good cutter action as in a line-o'-battleship fight, though you may not come by a title nor the thanks of Parliament for it. There's Hamilton, for example, the quiet, pale-faced man who is leaning against the pillar. It was he who, with six rowing-boats, cut out the 44-gun frigate *Hermione* from under the muzzles of two hundred shore-guns in the harbour of Puerto Cabello. No finer action was done in the whole war. There's Jaheel Brenton, with the whiskers. It was he who

attacked twelve Spanish gunboats in his one little brig, and made four of them strike to him. There's Walker, of the *Rose* cutter, who, with thirteen men, engaged three French privateers with crews of a hundred and forty-six. He sank one, captured one, and chased the third. How are you, Captain Ball? I hope I see you well?"

Two or three of my father's acquaintances who had been sitting close by drew up their chairs to us, and soon quite a circle had formed, all talking loudly and arguing upon sea matters, shaking their long, red-tipped pipes at each other as they spoke. My father whispered in my ear that his neighbour was Captain Foley, of the *Goliath*, who led the van at the Nile, and that the tall, thin, foxy-haired man opposite was Lord Cochrane, the most dashing frigate captain in the Service. Even at Friar's Oak we had heard how, in the little *Speedy*, of fourteen small guns with fifty-four men, he had carried by boarding the Spanish frigate *Gamo* with her crew of three hundred. It was easy to see that he was a quick, irascible, high-blooded man, for he was talking hotly about his grievances with a flush of anger upon his freckled cheeks.

"We shall never do any good upon the ocean until we have hanged the dockyard contractors," he cried. "I'd have a dead dockyard contractor as a figure-head for every first-rate in the fleet, and a provision dealer for every frigate. I know them with their puttied seams and their devil bolts, risking five hundred lives that they may steal a few pounds' worth of copper. What became of the *Chance*, and of the *Martin*, and of the *Orestes*? They foundered at sea, and were never heard of more, and I say the crews of them were murdered men."

Lord Cochrane seemed to be expressing the views of all, for a murmur of assent, with a mutter of hearty, deep-sea curses, ran round the circle.

"Those rascals over yonder manage things better," said an old one-eyed captain, with the blue-and-white riband for St. Vincent peeping out of his third button-hole. "They sheer away their heads if they get up to

any foolery. Did ever a vessel come out of Toulon as my 38-gun frigate did from Plymouth last year, with her masts rolling about until her shrouds were like iron bars on one side and hanging in festoons upon the other? The meanest sloop that ever sailed out of France would have overmatched her, and then it would be on me, and not on this Devonport bungler, that a court-martial would be called."

They loved to grumble, those old salts, for as soon as one had shot off his grievance his neighbour would follow with another, each more bitter than the last.

"Look at our sails!" cried Captain Foley. "Put a French and a British ship at anchor together, and how can you tell which is which?"

"Frenchy has his fore and maintop-gallant masts about equal," said my father.

"In the old ships, maybe, but how many of the new are laid down on the French model? No, there's no way of telling them at anchor. But let them hoist sail, and how d'you tell them then?"

"Frenchy has white sails," cried several.

"And ours are black and rotten. That's the difference. No wonder they outsail us when the wind can blow through our canvas."

"In the *Speedy*," said Cochrane, "the sailcloth was so thin that, when I made my observation, I always took my meridian through the foretopsail and my horizon through the foresail."

There was a general laugh at this, and then at it they all went again, letting off into speech all those weary broodings and silent troubles which had rankled during long years of service, for an iron discipline prevented them from speaking when their feet were upon their own quarter-decks. One told of his powder, six pounds of which were needed to throw a ball a thousand yards. Another cursed the Admiralty Courts, where a prize goes in as a full-rigged ship and comes out as a schooner. The old captain spoke of the promotions by Parliamentary

interest which had put many a youngster into the captain's cabin when he should have been in the gun-room. And then they came back to the difficulty of finding crews for their vessels, and they all together raised up their voices and wailed.

"What is the use of building fresh ships," cried Foley, "when even with a ten-pound bounty you can't man the ships that you have got?"

But Lord Cochrane was on the other side in this question.

"You'd have the men, sir, if you treated them well when you got them," said he. "Admiral Nelson can get his ships manned. So can Admiral Collingwood. Why? Because he has thought for the men, and so the men have thought for him. Let men and officers know and respect each other, and there's no difficulty in keeping a ship's company. It's the infernal plan of turning a crew over from ship to ship and leaving the officers behind that rots the Navy. But I have never found a difficulty, and I dare swear that if I hoist my pennant to-morrow I shall have all my old *Speedies* back, and as many volunteers as I care to take."

"That is very well, my lord," said the old captain, with some warmth; "when the Jacks hear that the *Speedy* took fifty vessels in thirteen months, they are sure to volunteer to serve with her commander. Every good cruiser can fill her complement quickly enough. But it is not the cruisers that fight the country's battles and blockade the enemy's ports. I say that all prize-money should be divided equally among the whole fleet, and until you have such a rule, the smartest men will always be found where they are of least service to anyone but themselves."

This speech produced a chorus of protests from the cruisers officers and a hearty agreement from the line-of-battle-ship men, who seemed to be in the majority in the circle which had gathered round. From the flushed faces and angry glances it was evident that the question

was one upon which there was strong feeling upon both sides.

"What the cruiser gets the cruiser earns," cried a frigate captain.

"Do you mean to say, sir," said Captain Foley, "that the duties of an officer upon a cruiser demand more care or higher professional ability than those of one who is employed upon blockade service, with a lee coast under him whenever the wind shifts to the west, and the top-masts of an enemy's squadron for ever in his sight?"

"I do not claim higher ability, sir."

"Then why should you claim higher pay? Can you deny that a seaman before the mast makes more in a fast frigate than a lieutenant can in a battle-ship?"

"It was only last year," said a very gentlemanly-looking officer, who might have passed for a buck upon town had his skin not been burned to copper in such sunshine as never bursts upon London—"it was only last year that I brought the old *Alexander* back from the Mediterranean, floating like an empty barrel and carrying nothing but honour for her cargo. In the Channel we fell in with the frigate *Minerva* from the Western Ocean, with her lee ports under water and her hatches bursting with the plunder which had been too valuable to trust to the prize crews. She had ingots of silver along her yards and bowsprit, and a bit of silver plate at the truck of the masts. My Jacks could have fired into her, and would, too, if they had not been held back. It made them mad to think of all they had done in the south, and then to see this saucy frigate flashing her money before their eyes."

"I cannot see their grievance, Captain Ball," said Cochrane.

"When you are promoted to a two-decker, my lord, it will possibly become clearer to you."

"You speak as if a cruiser had nothing to do but take prizes. If that is your view, you will permit me to say that you know very little of the matter. I have handled a sloop, a corvette and a frigate, and I have found a great

variety of duties in each of them. I have had to avoid the enemy's battle-ships and to fight his cruisers. I have had to chase and capture his privateers, and to cut them out when they run under his batteries. I have had to engage his forts, to take my men ashore, and to destroy his guns and his signal stations. All this, with convoying, reconnoitring, and risking one's own ship in order to gain a knowledge of the enemy's movements, comes under the duties of the commander of a cruiser. I make bold to say that the man who can carry these objects out with success has deserved better of the country than the officer of a battle-ship, tacking from Ushant to the Black Rocks and back again until she builds up a reef with her beef-bones."

"Sir," said the angry old sailor, "such an officer is at least in no danger of being mistaken for a privateersman."

"I am surprised, Captain Bulkeley," Cochrane retorted hotly, "that you should venture to couple the names of privateersman and King's officer."

There was mischief brewing among these hot-headed, short-spoken salts, but Captain Foley changed the subject to discuss the new ships which were being built in the French ports. It was of interest to me to hear these men, who were spending their lives in fighting against our neighbours, discussing their character and ways. You cannot conceive—you who live in times of peace and charity—how fierce the hatred was in England at that time against the French, and above all against their great leader. It was more than a mere prejudice or dislike. It was a deep, aggressive loathing of which you may even now form some conception if you examine the papers or caricatures of the day. The word "Frenchman" was hardly spoken without "rascal" or "scoundrel" slipping in before it. In all ranks of life and in every part of the country the feeling was the same. Even the Jacks aboard our ships fought with a viciousness against a French vessel which they would never show to Dane, Dutchman or Spaniard.

If you ask me now, after fifty years, why it was that there should have been this virulent feeling against them, so foreign to the easy-going and tolerant British nature, I would confess that I think the real reason was fear. Not fear of them individually, of course—our foulest detractors have never called us faint-hearted—but fear of their star, fear of their future, fear of the subtle brain whose plans always seemed to go aright, and of the heavy hand which had struck nation after nation to the ground. We were but a small country, with a population which, when the war began, was not much more than half that of France. And then, France had increased by leaps and bounds, reaching out to the north into Belgium and Holland, and to the south into Italy, whilst we were weakened by deep-lying disaffection among both Catholics and Presbyterians in Ireland. The danger was imminent and plain to the least thoughtful. One could not walk the Kent coast without seeing the beacons heaped up to tell the country of the enemy's landing, and if the sun were shining on the uplands near Boulogne, one might catch the flash of its gleam upon the bayonets of manœuvring veterans. No wonder that a fear of the French power lay deeply in the hearts of the most gallant men, and that fear should, as it always does, beget a bitter and rancorous hatred.

The seamen did not speak kindly then of their recent enemies. Their hearts loathed them, and in the fashion of our country their lips said what the heart felt. Of the French officers they could not have spoken with more chivalry, as of worthy foemen, but the nation was an abomination to them. The older men had fought against them in the American War, they had fought again for the last ten years, and the dearest wish of their hearts seemed to be that they might be called upon to do the same for the remainder of their days. Yet if I was surprised by the virulence of their animosity against the French, I was even more so to hear how highly they rated them as antagonists. The long succession of British

victories which had finally made the French take to their ports and resign the struggle in despair had given all of us the idea that for some reason a Briton on the water must, in the nature of things, always have the best of it against a Frenchman. But these men who had done the fighting did not think so. They were loud in their praise of their foemen's gallantry, and precise in their reasons for his defeat. They showed how the officers of the old French Navy had nearly all been aristocrats. How the Revolution had swept them out of their ships, and the force been left with insubordinate seamen and no competent leaders. This ill-directed fleet had been hustled into port by the pressure of the well-manned and well-commanded British, who had pinned them there ever since, so that they had never had an opportunity of learning seamanship. Their harbour drill and their harbour gunnery had been of no service when sails had to be trimmed and broadsides fired on the heave of an Atlantic swell. Let one of their frigates get to sea and have a couple of years' free run in which the crew might learn their duties, and then it would be a feather in the cap of a British officer if with a ship of equal force he could bring down her colours.

Such were the views of these experienced officers, fortified by many reminiscences and examples of French gallantry, such as the way in which the crew of the *L'Orient* had fought her quarter-deck guns when the main-deck was in a blaze beneath them, and when they must have known that they were standing over an exploding magazine. The general hope was that the West Indian expedition since the peace might have given many of their fleet an ocean training, and that they might be tempted out into mid-Channel if the war were to break out afresh. But would it break out afresh? We had spent gigantic sums and made enormous exertions to curb the power of Napoleon and to prevent him from becoming the universal despot of Europe. Would the Government try it again? Or were they appalled by

the gigantic load of debt which must bend the backs of many generations unborn? Pitt was there, and surely he was not a man to leave his work half done.

And then suddenly there was a bustle at the door. Amid the grey swirl of the tobacco-smoke I could catch a glimpse of a blue coat and gold epaulettes, with a crowd gathering thickly round them, while a hoarse murmur rose from the group which thickened into a deep-chested cheer. Everyone was on his feet, peering and asking each other what it might mean. And still the crowd seethed and the cheering swelled.

"What is it? What has happened?" cried a score of voices.

"Put him up! Hoist him up!" shouted somebody, and an instant later I saw Captain Troubridge appear above the shoulders of the crowd. His face was flushed, as if he were in wine, and he was waving what seemed to be a letter in the air. The cheering died away, and there was such a hush that I could hear the crackle of the paper in his hand.

"Great news, gentlemen!" he roared. "Glorious news! Rear-Admiral Collingwood has directed me to communicate it to you. The French Ambassador has received his papers to-night. Every ship on the list is to go into commission. Admiral Cornwallis is ordered out of Cawsand Bay to cruise off Ushant. A squadron is starting for the North Sea and another for the Irish Channel."

He may have had more to say, but his audience could wait no longer. How they shouted and stamped and raved in their delight! Harsh old flag-officers, grave post-captains, young lieutenants, all were roaring like schoolboys breaking up for the holidays. There was no thought now of those manifold and weary grievances to which I had listened. The foul weather was passed, and the landlocked sea-birds would be out on the foam once more. The rhythm of "God Save the King" swelled through the babel, and I heard the old lines sung in a

way that made you forget their bad rhymes and their bald sentiments. I trust that you will never hear them so sung, with tears upon rugged cheeks, and catchings of the breath from strong men. Dark days will have come again before you hear such a song or see such a sight as that. Let those talk of the phlegm of our countrymen who have never seen them when the lava crust of restraint is broken, and when for an instant the strong, enduring fires of the North glow upon the surface. I saw them then, and if I do not see them now, I am not so old or so foolish as to doubt that they are there.

13. *Lord Nelson*

MY father's appointment with Lord Nelson was an early one, and he was the more anxious to be punctual as he knew how much the Admiral's movements must be affected by the news which we had heard the night before. I had hardly breakfasted then, and my uncle had not rung for his chocolate, when he called for me at Jermyn Street. A walk of a few hundred yards brought us to the high building of discoloured brick in Piccadilly, which served the Hamiltons as a town house, and which Nelson used as his headquarters when business or pleasure called him from Merton. A footman answered our knock, and we were ushered into a large drawing-room with sombre furniture and melancholy curtains. My father sent in his name, and there we sat, looking at the white Italian statuettes in the corners, and the picture of Vesuvius and the Bay of Naples which hung over the harpsichord. I can remember that a black clock was ticking loudly upon the mantelpiece, and that every now and then, amid the rumble of the hackney coaches, we could hear boisterous laughter from some inner chamber.

When at last the door opened, both my father and I sprang to our feet, expecting to find ourselves face to

face with the greatest living Englishman. It was a very different person, however, who swept into the room.

She was a lady, tall, and, as it seemed to me, exceedingly beautiful, though, perhaps, one who was more experienced and more critical might have thought that her charm lay in the past rather than the present. Her queenly figure was moulded upon large and noble lines, while her face, though already tending to become somewhat heavy and coarse, was still remarkable for the brilliancy of the complexion, the beauty of the large, light blue eyes, and the tinge of the dark hair which curled over the low white forehead. She carried herself in the most stately fashion, so that as I looked at her majestic entrance, and at the pose which she struck as she glanced at my father, I was reminded of the Queen of the Peruvians as, in the person of Miss Polly Hinton, she incited Boy Jim and myself to insurrection.

"Lieutenant Anson Stone?" she asked.

"Yes, your ladyship," answered my father.

"Ah," she cried, with an affected and exaggerated start, "you know me, then?"

"I have seen your ladyship at Naples."

"Then you have doubtless seen my poor Sir William also—my poor, poor Sir William!" She touched her dress with her white, ring-covered fingers, as if to draw our attention to the fact that she was in the deepest mourning.

"I heard of your ladyship's sad loss," said my father.

"We died together," she cried. "What can my life be now save a long-drawn living death?"

She spoke in a beautiful, rich voice, with the most heart-broken thrill in it, but I could not conceal from myself that she appeared to be one of the most robust persons that I had ever seen, and I was surprised to notice that she shot arch little questioning glances at me, as if the admiration even of so insignificant a person were of some interest to her. My father, in his blunt, sailor fashion, tried to stammer out some commonplace

condolence, but her eyes swept past his rude, weather-beaten face to ask and re-ask what effect she had made upon me.

"There he hangs, the tutelary angel of this house," she cried, pointing with a grand sweeping gesture to a painting upon the wall, which represented a very thin-faced, high-nosed gentleman with several orders upon his coat. "But enough of my private sorrow!" She dashed invisible tears from her eyes. "You have come to see Lord Nelson. He bid me say that he would be with you in an instant. You have doubtless heard that hostilities are about to reopen?"

"We heard the news last night."

"Lord Nelson is under orders to take command of the Mediterranean Fleet. You can think at such a moment—— But, ah, is it not his lordship's step that I hear?"

My attention was so riveted by the lady's curious manner and by the gestures and attitudes with which she accompanied every remark, that I did not see the great admiral enter the room. When I turned he was standing close by my elbow, a small, brown man with the lithe, slim figure of a boy. He was not clad in uniform, but he wore a high-collared brown coat, with the right sleeve hanging limp and empty by his side. The expression of his face was, as I remember it, exceedingly sad and gentle, with the deep lines upon it which told of the chafing of his urgent and fiery soul. One eye was disfigured and sightless from a wound, but the other looked from my father to myself with the quickest and shrewdest of expressions. Indeed, his whole manner, with his short, sharp glance and the fine poise of the head, spoke of energy and alertness, so that he reminded me, if I may compare great things with small, of a well-bred fighting terrier, gentle and slim, but keen and ready for whatever chance might send.

"Why, Lieutenant Stone," said he, with great cordiality, holding out his left hand to my father, "I am very

glad to see you. London is full of Mediterranean men, but I trust that in a week there will not be an officer amongst you all with his feet on dry land."

"I had come to ask you, sir, if you could assist me to a ship."

"You shall have one, Stone, if my word goes for anything at the Admiralty. I shall want all my old Nile men at my back. I cannot promise you a first-rate, but at least it shall be a 64-gun ship, and I can tell you that there is much to be done with a handy, well-manned, well-found 64-gun ship."

"Who could doubt it who has heard of the *Agamemnon*?" cried Lady Hamilton, and straightway she began to talk of the admiral and of his doings with such extravagance of praise and such a shower of compliments and of epithets, that my father and I did not know which way to look, feeling shame and sorrow for a man who was compelled to listen to such things said in his own presence. But when I ventured to glance at Lord Nelson, I found, to my surprise, that, far from showing any embarrassment, he was smiling with pleasure, as if this gross flattery of her ladyship's were the dearest thing in all the world to him.

"Come, come, my dear lady," said he, "you speak vastly beyond my merits"; upon which encouragement she started again in a theatrical apostrophe to Britain's darling and Neptune's eldest son, which he endured with the same signs of gratitude and pleasure. That a man of the world, five-and-forty years of age, shrewd, honest, and acquainted with Courts, should be beguiled by such crude and coarse homage, amazed me, as it did all who knew him; but you who have seen much of life do not need to be told how often the strongest and noblest nature has its one inexplicable weakness, showing up the more obviously in contrast to the rest, as the dark stain looks the fouler upon the whitest sheet.

"You are a sea-officer of my own heart, Stone," said he, when her ladyship had exhausted her panegyric.

"You are one of the old breed!" He walked up and down with little, impatient steps as he talked, turning with a whisk upon his heel every now and then, as if some invisible rail had brought him up. "We are getting too fine for our work with these new-fangled epaulettes and quarter-deck trimmings. When I joined the Service, you would find a lieutenant gammoning and rigging his own bowsprit, or aloft, maybe, with a marlin-spike slung round his neck, showing an example to his men. Now, it's as much as he'll do to carry his own sextant up the companion. When could you join?"

"To-night, my lord."

"Right, Stone, right! That is the true spirit. They are working double tides in the yards, but I do not know when the ships will be ready. I hoist my flag on the *Victory* on Wednesday, and we sail at once."

"No, no; not so soon! She cannot be ready for sea," said Lady Hamilton, in a wailing voice, clasping her hands and turning up her eyes as she spoke.

"She must and she shall be ready," cried Nelson, with extraordinary vehemence. "By Heaven! if the devil stands at the door, I sail on Wednesday. Who knows what these rascals may be doing in my absence? It maddens me to think of the deviltries which they may be devising. At this very instant, dear lady, the Queen, *our* Queen, may be straining her eyes for the topsails of Nelson's ships."

Thinking, as I did, that he was speaking of our own old Queen Charlotte, I could make no meaning out of this; but my father told me afterwards that both Nelson and Lady Hamilton had conceived an extraordinary affection for the Queen of Naples, and that it was the interests of her little kingdom which he had so strenuously at heart. It may have been my expression of bewilderment which attracted Nelson's attention to me, for he suddenly stopped in his quick quarter-deck walk and looked me up and down with a severe eye.

"Well, young gentleman!" said he, sharply.

"This is my only son, sir," said my father. "It is my wish that he should join the Service, if a berth can be found for him; for we have all been King's officers for many generations."

"So, you wish to come and have your bones broken?" cried Nelson, roughly, looking with much disfavour at the fine clothes which had cost my uncle and Mr. Brummell such a debate. "You will have to change that grand coat for a tarry jacket if you serve under me, sir."

I was so embarrassed by the abruptness of his manner that I could but stammer out that I hoped I should do my duty, on which the stern mouth relaxed into a good-humoured smile, and he laid his little brown hand for an instant upon my shoulder.

"I dare say that you will do very well," said he. "I can see that you have the stuff in you. But do not imagine that it is a light service which you undertake, young gentleman, when you enter His Majesty's Navy. It is a hard profession. You hear of the few who succeed, but what do you know of the hundreds who never find their way? Look at my own luck! Out of 200 who were with me in the San Juan expedition, 145 died in a single night. I have been in 180 engagements, and I have, as you see, lost my eye and my arm, and been sorely wounded besides. It chanced that I came through, and here I am flying my admiral's flag; but I remember many a man as good as me who did not come through. Yes," he added, as her ladyship broke in with a voluble protest, "many and many as good a man who has gone to the sharks or the land-crabs. But it is a useless sailor who does not risk himself every day, and the lives of all of us are in the hands of Him who best knows when to claim them."

For an instant, in his earnest gaze and reverent manner, we seemed to catch a glimpse of the deeper, truer Nelson, the man of the Eastern counties, steeped in the virile Puritanism which sent from that district the Ironsides to fashion England within, and the Pilgrim Fathers to spread

it without. Here was the Nelson who declared that he saw the hand of God pressing upon the French, and who waited on his knees in the cabin of his flag-ship while she bore down upon the enemy's line. There was a human tenderness, too, in his way of speaking of his dead comrades, which made me understand why it was that he was so beloved by all who served with him, for, iron-hard as he was as seaman and fighter, there ran through his complex nature a sweet and un-English power of affectionate emotion, showing itself in tears if he were moved, and in such tender impulses as led him afterwards to ask his flag-captain to kiss him as he lay dying in the cockpit of the *Victory*.

My father had risen to depart, but the admiral, with that kindliness which he ever showed to the young, and which had been momentarily chilled by the unfortunate splendour of my clothes, still paced up and down in front of us, shooting out crisp little sentences of exhortation and advice.

"It is ardour that we need in the Service, young gentleman," said he. "We need red-hot men who will never rest satisfied. We had them in the Mediterranean, and we shall have them again. There was a band of brothers! When I was asked to recommend one for special service, I told the Admiralty they might take the names as they came, for the same spirit animated them all. Had we taken nineteen vessels, we should never have said it was well done while the twentieth sailed the seas. You know how it was with us, Stone. You are too old a Mediterranean man for me to tell you anything."

"I trust, my lord, that I shall be with you when next we meet them," said my father.

"Meet them we shall and must. By Heaven, I shall never rest until I have given them a shaking. The scoundrel Buonaparte wishes to humble us. Let him try, and God help the better cause!"

He spoke with such extraordinary animation that the empty sleeve flapped about in the air, giving him the

strangest appearance. Seeing my eyes fixed upon it, he turned with a smile to my father.

"I can still work my fin, Stone," said he, putting his hand across to the stump of his arm. "What used they to say in the fleet about it?"

"That it was a sign, sir, that it was a bad hour to cross your hawse."

"They knew me, the rascals. You can see, young gentleman, that not a scrap of the ardour with which I serve my country has been shot away. Some day you may find that you are flying your own flag, and when that time comes you may remember that my advice to an officer is that he should have nothing to do with tame, slow measures. Lay all your stake, and if you lose through no fault of your own, the country will find you another stake as large. Never mind manœuvres! Go for them! The only manœuvre you need is that which will place you alongside your enemy. Always fight, and you will always be right. Give not a thought to your own ease or your own life, for from the day that you draw the blue coat over your back you have no life of your own. It is the country's, to be most freely spent if the smallest gain can come from it. How is the wind this morning, Stone?"

"East-south-east," my father answered readily.

"Then Cornwallis is, doubtless, keeping well up to Brest, though, for my own part, I had rather tempt them out into the open sea."

"That is what every officer and man in the fleet would prefer, your lordship," said my father.

"They do not love the blockading service, and it is little wonder, since neither money nor honour is to be gained at it. You can remember how it was in the winter months before Toulon, Stone, when we had neither firing, wine, beef, pork nor flour aboard the ships, nor a spare piece of rope, canvas or twine. We braced the old hulks with our spare cables, and God knows there was never a Levanter that I did not expect it to send us to

the bottom. But we held our grip all the same. Yet I fear that we do not get much credit for it here in England, Stone, where they light the windows for a great battle, but they do not understand that it is easier for us to fight the Nile six times over, than to keep our station all winter in the blockade. But I pray God that we may meet this new fleet of theirs and settle the matter by a pell-mell battle."

"May I be with you, my lord!" said my father, earnestly. "But we have already taken too much of your time, and so I beg to thank you for your kindness and to wish you good morning."

"Good morning, Stone!" said Nelson. "You shall have your ship, and if I can make this young gentleman one of my officers it shall be done. But I gather from his dress," he continued, running his eye over me, "that you have been more fortunate in prize-money than most of your comrades. For my own part, I never did nor could turn my thoughts to money-making."

My father explained that I had been under the charge of the famous Sir Charles Tregellis, who was my uncle, and with whom I was now residing.

"Then you need no help from me," said Nelson, with some bitterness. "If you have either guineas or interest you can climb over the heads of old sea-officers, though you may not know the poop from the galley, or a carronade from a long nine. Nevertheless—— But what the deuce have we here?"

The footman had suddenly precipitated himself into the room, but stood abashed before the fierce glare of the admiral's eye.

"Your lordship told me to rush to you if it should come," he explained, holding out a large blue envelope.

"By Heaven, it is my orders!" cried Nelson, snatching it up and fumbling with it in his awkward, one-handed attempt to break the seals. Lady Hamilton ran to his assistance, but no sooner had she glanced at the paper enclosed than she burst into a shrill scream, and throwing

up her hands and her eyes, she sank backwards in a swoon. I could not but observe, however, that her fall was very carefully executed, and that she was fortunate enough, in spite of her insensibility, to arrange her drapery and attitude into a graceful and classical design. But he, the honest seaman, so incapable of deceit or affectation that he could not suspect it in others, ran madly to the bell, shouting for the maid, the doctor and the smelling-salts, with incoherent words of grief, and such passionate terms of emotion that my father thought it more discreet to twitch me by the sleeve as a signal that we should steal from the room. There we left him then in the dim-lit London drawing-room, beside himself with pity for this shallow and most artificial woman, while without, at the edge of the Piccadilly curb, there stood the high dark berline ready to start him upon that long journey which was to end in his chase of the French fleet over seven thousand miles of ocean, his meeting with it, his victory, which confined Napoleon's ambition for ever to the land, and his death, coming, as I would it might come to all of us, at the crowning moment of his life.

14. *On the Road*

AND now the day of the great fight began to approach. Even the imminent outbreak of war and the renewed threats of Napoleon were secondary things in the eyes of the sportsmen—and the sportsmen in those days made a large half of the population. In the club of the patrician and the plebeian gin-shop, in the coffee-house of the merchant or the barrack of the soldier, in London or the provinces, the same question was interesting the whole nation. Every west-country coach brought up word of the fine condition of Crab Wilson, who had returned to his own native air for his training, and was known to be under the immediate care of Captain Barclay, the expert. On the other hand,

although my uncle had not yet named his man, there was no doubt amongst the public that Jim was to be his nominee, and the report of his physique and of his performance found him many backers. On the whole, however, the betting was in favour of Wilson, for Bristol and the west country stood by him to a man, whilst London opinion was divided. Three to two were to be had on Wilson at any West End club two days before the battle.

I had twice been down to Crawley to see Jim in his training quarters, where I found him undergoing the severe regimen which was usual. From early dawn until nightfall he was running, jumping, striking a bladder which swung upon a bar, or sparring with his formidable trainer. His eyes shone and his skin glowed with exuberant health, and he was so confident of success that my own misgivings vanished as I watched his gallant bearing and listened to his quiet and cheerful words.

" But I wonder that you should come and see me now, Rodney," said he, when we parted, trying to laugh as he spoke. " I have become a bruiser and your uncle's paid man, whilst you are a Corinthian upon town. If you had not been the best and truest little gentleman in the world, you would have been my patron instead of my friend before now."

When I looked at this splendid fellow, with his high-bred, clean-cut face, and thought of the fine qualities and gentle, generous impulses which I knew to lie within him, it seemed so absurd that he should speak as though my friendship towards him were a condescension, that I could not help laughing aloud.

" That is all very well, Rodney," said he, looking hard into my eyes. " But what does your uncle think about it ? "

This was a poser, and I could only answer lamely enough that, much as I was indebted to my uncle, I had known Jim first, and that I was surely old enough to choose my own friends.

Jim's misgivings were so far correct that my uncle

did very strongly object to any intimacy between us; but there were so many other points in which he disapproved of my conduct, that it made the less difference. I fear that he was already disappointed in me. I would not develop an eccentricity, although he was good enough to point out several by which I might "come out of the ruck," as he expressed it, and so catch the attention of the strange world in which he lived.

"You are an active young fellow, nephew," said he. "Do you not think that you could engage to climb round the furniture of an ordinary room without setting foot upon the ground? Some little *tour-de-force* of the sort is in excellent taste. There was a captain in the Guards who attained considerable social success by doing it for a small wager. Lady Lieven, who is exceedingly exigeant, used to invite him to her evenings merely that he might exhibit it."

I had to assure him that the feat would be beyond me.

"You are just a little *difficile*," said he, shrugging his shoulders. "As my nephew, you might have taken your position by perpetuating my own delicacy of taste. If you had made bad taste your enemy, the world of fashion would willingly have looked upon you as an arbiter by virtue of your family traditions, and you might without a struggle have stepped into the position to which this young upstart Brummell aspires. But you have no instinct in that direction. You are incapable of minute attention to detail. Look at your shoes! Look at your cravat! Look at your watch-chain! Two links are enough to show. I *have* shown three, but it was an indiscretion. At this moment I can see no less than five of yours. I regret it, nephew, but I do not think that you are destined to attain that position which I have a right to expect from my blood relation."

"I am sorry to be a disappointment to you, sir," said I.

"It is your misfortune not to have come under my influence earlier," said he. "I might then have moulded you so as to have satisfied even my own aspirations. I

had a younger brother whose case was a similar one. I did what I could for him, but he would wear ribbons in his shoes, and he publicly mistook white Burgundy for Rhine wine. Eventually the poor fellow took to books, and lived and died in a country vicarage. He was a good man, but he was commonplace, and there is no place in society for commonplace people."

"Then I fear, sir, that there is none for me," said I. "But my father has every hope that Lord Nelson will find me a position in the fleet. If I have been a failure in town, I am none the less conscious of your kindness in trying to advance my interests, and I hope that, should I receive my commission, I may be a credit to you yet."

"It is possible that you may attain the very spot which I had marked out for you, but by another road," said my uncle. "There are many men in town, such as Lord St. Vincent, Lord Hood and others, who move in the most respectable circles, although they have nothing but their services in the Navy to recommend them."

It was on the afternoon of the day before the fight that this conversation took place between my uncle and myself in the dainty sanctum of his Jermyn Street house. He was clad, I remember, in his flowing brocade dressing-gown, as was his custom before he set off for his club, and his foot was extended upon a stool—for Abernethy had just been in to treat him for an incipient attack of the gout. It may have been the pain, or it may have been his disappointment at my career, but his manner was more testy than was usual with him, and I fear that there was something of a sneer in his smile as he spoke of my deficiencies. For my own part I was relieved at the explanation, for my father had left London in the full conviction that a vacancy would speedily be found for us both, and the one thing which had weighed upon my mind was that I might have found it hard to leave my uncle without interfering with the plans which he had formed. I was heart-weary of this empty life, for which I was so ill-fashioned, and weary also of that intolerant talk which

would make a coterie of frivolous women and foolish fops the central point of the universe. Something of my uncle's sneer may have flickered upon my lips as I heard him allude with supercilious surprise to the presence in those sacrosanct circles of the men who had stood between the country and destruction.

" By the way, nephew," said he, " gout or no gout, and whether Abernethy likes it or not, we must be down at Crawley to-night. The battle will take place upon Crawley Downs. Sir Lothian Hume and his man are at Reigate. I have reserved beds at the George for both of us. The crush will, it is said, exceed anything ever known. The smell of these country inns is always most offensive to me—*mais que voulez-vous?* Berkeley Craven was saying in the club last night that there is not a bed within twenty miles of Crawley which is not bespoke, and that they are charging three guineas for the night. I hope that your young friend, if I must describe him as such, will fulfil the promise which he has shown, for I have rather more upon the event than I care to lose. Sir Lothian has been plunging also—he made a single bye-bet of five thousand to three upon Wilson in Limmer's yesterday. From what I hear of his affairs it will be a serious matter for him if we should pull it off. Well, Lorimer? "

" A person to see you, Sir Charles," said the new valet.

" You know that I never see anyone until my dressing is complete."

" He insists upon seeing you, sir. He pushed open the door."

" Pushed it open! What d'you mean, Lorimer? Why didn't you put him out? "

A smile passed over the servant's face. At the same moment there came a deep voice from the passage.

" You show me in this instant, young man, d'ye 'ear? Let me see your master, or it'll be the worse for you."

I thought that I had heard the voice before, but when, over the shoulder of the valet, I caught a glimpse of a

large, fleshy bull-face, with a flattened Michael Angelo nose in the centre of it, I knew at once that it was my neighbour at the supper party.

"It's Warr, the prize-fighter, sir," said I.

"Yes, sir," said our visitor, pushing his huge form into the room. "It's Bill Warr, landlord of the One Tun public-'ouse, Jermyn Street, and the gamest man upon the list. There's only one thing that ever beat me, Sir Charles, and that was my flesh, which creeps over me that amazin' fast that I've always got four stone that 'as no business there. Why, sir, I've got enough to spare to make a feather-weight champion out of. You'd 'ardly think, to look at me, that even after Mendoza fought me I was able to jump the four-foot ropes at the ring-side just as light as a little kiddy; but if I was to chuck my castor into the ring now I'd never get it till the wind blew it out again, for blow my dicky if I could climb after. My respec's to you, young sir, and I 'ope I see you well."

My uncle's face had expressed considerable disgust at this invasion of his privacy, but it was part of his position to be on good terms with the fighting-men, so he contented himself with asking curtly what business had brought him there. For answer the huge prize-fighter looked meaningly at the valet.

"It's important, Sir Charles, and between man and man," said he.

"You may go, Lorimer. Now, Warr, what is the matter?"

The bruiser very calmly seated himself astride of a chair with his arms resting upon the back of it.

"I've got information, Sir Charles," said he.

"Well, what is it?" cried my uncle, impatiently.

"Information of value."

"Out with it, then!"

"Information that's worth money," said Warr, and pursed up his lips.

"I see. You want to be paid for what you know?"

The prize-fighter smiled an affirmative.

"Well, I don't buy things on trust. You should know me better than to try on such a game with me."

"I know you for what you are, Sir Charles, and that is a noble, slap-up Corinthian. But if I was to use this against you, d'ye see, it would be worth 'undreds in my pocket. But my 'eart won't let me do it, for Bill Warr's always been on the side o' good sport and fair play. If I use it for you, then I expect that you won't see me the loser."

"You can do what you like," said my uncle. "If your news is of service to me, I shall know how to treat you."

"You can't say fairer than that. We'll let it stand there, gov'nor, and you'll do the 'andsome thing, as you 'ave always 'ad the name for doin'. Well, then, your man, Jim 'Arrison, fights Crab Wilson, of Gloucester, at Crawley Down to-morrow mornin' for a stake."

"What of that?"

"Did you 'appen to know what the bettin' was yesterday?"

"It was three to two on Wilson."

"Right you are, gov'nor. Three to two was offered in my own bar-parlour. D'you know what the bettin' is to-day?"

"I have not been out yet."

"Then I'll tell you. It's seven to one against your man."

"What?"

"Seven to one, gov'nor, no less."

"You're talking nonsense, Warr! How could the betting change from three to two to seven to one?"

"I've been to Tom Owen's, and I've been to the 'Ole in the Wall, and I've been to the Waggon and 'Orses, and you can get seven to one in any of them. There's tons of money being laid against your man. It's a 'orse to a 'en in every sportin' 'ouse and boozin' ken from 'ere to Stepney."

For a moment the expression upon my uncle's face made

me realise that this match was really a serious matter to him. Then he shrugged his shoulders with an incredulous smile.

"All the worse for the fools who give the odds," said he. "My man is all right. You saw him yesterday, nephew?"

"He was all right yesterday, sir."

"If anything had gone wrong I should have heard."

"But perhaps," said Warr, "it 'as not gone wrong with 'im *yet*."

"What d'you mean?"

"I'll tell you what I mean, sir. You remember Berks? You know that 'e ain't to be overmuch depended on at any time, and that 'e 'ad a grudge against your man 'cause 'e laid 'im out in the coach-'ouse. Well, last night about ten o'clock in 'e comes into my bar, and the three bloodiest rogues in London at 'is 'eels. There was Red Ike, 'im that was warned off the Ring 'cause 'e fought a cross with Bittoon; and there was Fightin' Yussef, who would sell 'is mother for a seven-shillin'-bit; the third was Chris McCarthy, who is a fogle-snatcher by trade, with a pitch outside the 'Aymarket Theatre. You don't often see four such beauties together, and all with as much as they could carry, save only Chris, who is too leary a cove to drink when there's somethin' goin' forward. For my part, I showed 'em into the parlour, not 'cos they was worthy of it, but 'cos I knew right well they would start bashin' some of my customers, and maybe get my licence into trouble if I left 'em in the bar. I served 'em with drink, and stayed with 'em just to see that they didn't lay their 'ands on the stuffed parroquet and the pictures.

"Well, gov'nor, to cut it short, they began to talk about the fight, and they all laughed at the idea that young Jim 'Arrison could win it—all except Chris, and 'e kept a-nudging and a-twitchin' at the others until Joe Berks nearly gave him a wipe across the face for 'is trouble. I saw somethin' was in the wind, and it wasn't very 'ard to guess what it was—especially when Red Ike was ready to put up a fiver that Jim 'Arrison would never fight at all.

So I up to get another bottle of liptrap, and I slipped round to the shutter that we pass the liquor through from the private bar into the parlour. I drew it an inch open, and I might 'ave been at the table with them, I could 'ear every word that clearly.

"There was Chris McCarthy growlin' at them for not kcepin' their tongues still, and there was Joe Berks swearin' that 'e would knock 'is face in if 'e darcd give 'im any of 'is lip. So Chris 'e sort of argued with them, for 'e was frightened of Berks, and 'e put it to them whether they would be fit for the job in the mornin', and whether the gov'nor would pay the money if 'e found they 'ad been drinkin' and were not to be trusted. This struck them sober, all three, an' Fighting Yussef asked what time they were to start. Chris said that as long as they were at Crawley before the George shut up they could work it. 'It's poor pay for a chance of a rope,' said Red Ike. 'Rope be damned!' cried Chris, takin' a little loaded stick out of his side pocket. 'If three of you 'old him down and I break his arm-bone with this, we've earned our money, and we don't risk more'n six months' jug.' ''E'll fight,' said Berks. 'Well, it's the only fight 'e'll get,' answered Chris, and that was all I 'eard of it. This mornin' out I went, and I found as I told you afore that the money is goin' on to Wilson by the ton, and that no odds are too long for the layers. So it stands, gov'nor, and you know what the meanin' of it may be better than Bill Warr can tell you."

"Very good, Warr," said my uncle, rising. "I am very much obliged to you for telling me this, and I will see that you are not a loser by it. I put it down as the gossip of drunken ruffians, but none the less you have served me vastly by calling my attention to it. I suppose I shall see you at the Downs to-morrow?"

"Mr. Jackson 'as asked me to be one o' the beaters-out, sir."

"Very good. I hope that we shall have a fair and good fight. Good day to you, and thank you."

My uncle had preserved his jaunty demeanour as long as Warr was in the room, but the door had hardly closed upon him before he turned to me with a face which was more agitated than I had ever seen it.

"We must be off for Crawley at once, nephew," said he, ringing the bell. "There's not a moment to be lost. Lorimer, order the bays to be harnessed in the curricle. Put the toilet things in, and tell William to have it round at the door as soon as possible."

"I'll see to it, sir," said I, and away I ran to the mews in Little Ryder Street, where my uncle stabled his horses. The groom was away, and I had to send a lad in search of him, while with the help of the liveryman I dragged the curricle from the coach-house and brought the two mares out of their stalls. It was half an hour, or possibly three-quarters, before everything had been found, and Lorimer was already waiting in Jermyn Street with the inevitable baskets, whilst my uncle stood in the open door of his house, clad in his long fawn-coloured driving-coat with no sign upon his calm pale face of the tumult of impatience which must, I was sure, be raging within.

"We shall leave you, Lorimer," said he. "We might find it hard to get a bed for you. Keep at her head, William! Jump in, nephew. Halloa, Warr, what is the matter now?"

The prize-fighter was hastening towards us as fast as his bulk would allow.

"Just one word before you go, Sir Charles," he panted. "I've just 'eard in my taproom that the four men I spoke of left for Crawley at one o'clock."

"Very good, Warr," said my uncle, with his foot upon the step.

"And the odds 'ave risen to ten to one."

"Let go her head, William!"

"Just one more word, gov'nor. You'll excuse the liberty, but if I was you I'd take my pistols with me."

"Thank you; I have them."

The long thong cracked between the ears of the leader,

the groom sprang for the pavement, and Jermyn Street had changed for St. James's, and that again for Whitehall with a swiftness which showed that the gallant mares were as impatient as their master. It was half-past four by the Parliament clock as we flew on to Westminster Bridge. There was the flash of water beneath us, and then we were between those two long dun-coloured lines of houses which had been the avenue which had led us to London. My uncle sat with tightened lips and a brooding brow. We had reached Streatham before he broke the silence.

"I have a good deal at stake, nephew," said he.

"So have I, sir," I answered.

"You!" he cried, in surprise.

"My friend, sir."

"Ah, yes, I had forgot. You have some eccentricities, after all, nephew. You are a faithful friend, which is a rare enough thing in our circles. I never had but one friend of my own position, and he—but you've heard me tell the story. I fear it will be dark before we reach Crawley."

"I fear that it will."

"In that case we may be too late."

"Pray God not, sir!"

"We sit behind the best cattle in England, but I fear lest we find the roads blocked before we get to Crawley. Did you observe, nephew, that these four villains spoke in Warr's hearing of the master who was behind them, and who was paying them for their infamy? Did you not understand that they were hired to cripple my man? Who, then, could have hired them? Who had an interest unless it was—— I know Sir Lothian Hume to be a desperate man. I know that he has had heavy card losses at Watier's and White's. I know also that he has much at stake upon this event, and that he has plunged upon it with a rashness which made his friends think that he had some private reason for being satisfied as to the result. By Heaven, it all hangs together. If it

should be so——!" He relapsed into silence, but I saw the same look of cold fierceness settle upon his features which I had marked there when he and Sir John Lade had raced wheel to wheel down the Godstone road.

The sun sank slowly towards the low Surrey hills, and the shadows crept steadily eastwards, but the whirr of the wheels and the roar of the hoofs never slackened. A fresh wind blew upon our faces, while the young leaves drooped motionless from the wayside branches. The golden edge of the sun was just sinking behind the oaks of Reigate Hill when the dripping mares drew up before the Crown at Redhill. The landlord, an old sportsman and ringsider, ran out to greet so well-known a Corinthian as Sir Charles Tregellis.

"You know Berks, the bruiser?" asked my uncle.

"Yes, Sir Charles."

"Has he passed?"

"Yes, Sir Charles. It may have been about four o'clock, though with this crowd of folk and carriages it's hard to swear to it. There was him, and Red Ike, and Fighting Yussef the Jew, and another, with a good bit of blood betwixt the shafts. They'd been driving her hard, too, for she was all in a lather."

"That's ugly, nephew," said my uncle, when we were flying onwards towards Reigate. "If they drove so hard, it looks as though they wished to get early to work."

"Jim and Belcher would surely be a match for the four of them," I suggested.

"If Belcher were with him I should have no fear. But you cannot tell what *diablerie* they may be up to. Let us only find him safe and sound, and I'll never lose sight of him until I see him in the ring. We'll sit up on guard with our pistols, nephew, and I only trust that these villains may be indiscreet enough to attempt it. But they must have been very sure of success before they put the odds up to such a figure, and it is that which alarms me."

"But surely they have nothing to win by such villainy,

sir ? If they were to hurt Jim Harrison the battle could not be fought, and the bets would not be decided."

" So it would be in an ordinary prize-battle, nephew ; and it is fortunate that it should be so, or the rascals who infest the Ring would soon make all sport impossible. But here it is different. On the terms of the wager I lose unless I can produce a man, within the prescribed ages, who can beat Crab Wilson. You must remember that I have never named my man. *C'est dommage*, but so it is ! We know who it is and so do our opponents, but the referees and stakeholder would take no notice of that. If we complain that Jim Harrison has been crippled, they would answer that they have no official knowledge that Jim Harrison was our nominee. It's play or pay, and the villains are taking advantage of it."

My uncle's fears as to our being blocked upon the road were only too well founded, for after we passed Reigate there was such a procession of every sort of vehicle, that I believe for the whole eight miles there was not a horse whose nose was further than a few feet from the back of the curricle or barouche in front. Every road leading from London, as well as those from Guildford in the west and Tunbridge in the east, had contributed its stream of four-in-hands, gigs and mounted sportsmen, until the whole broad Brighton highway was choked from ditch to ditch with a laughing, singing, shouting throng, all flowing in the same direction. No man who looked upon that motley crowd could deny that, for good or evil, the love of the Ring was confined to no class, but was a national peculiarity, deeply seated in the English nature, and a common heritage of the young aristocrat in his drag and of the rough costers sitting six deep in their pony cart. There I saw statesmen and soldiers, noblemen and lawyers, farmers and squires, with roughs of the East End and yokels of the shires, all toiling along with the prospect of a night of discomfort before them, on the chance of seeing a fight which might, for all that they knew, be decided in a single round. A more cheery

and hearty set of people could not be imagined, and the chaff flew about as thick as the dust clouds, while at every wayside inn the landlord and the drawers would be out with trays of foam-headed tankards to moisten those importunate throats. The ale-drinking, the rude good-fellowship, the heartiness, the laughter at discomforts, the craving to see the fight—all these may be set down as vulgar and trivial by those to whom they are distasteful ; but to me, listening to the far-off and uncertain echoes of our distant past, they seem to have been the very bones upon which much that is most solid and virile in this ancient race was moulded.

But, alas for our chance of hastening onwards ! Even my uncle's skill could not pick a passage through that moving mass. We could but fall into our places and be content to snail along from Reigate to Horley and on to Povey Cross and over Lowfield Heath, while day shaded away into twilight, and that deepened into night. At Kimberham Bridge the carriage-lamps were all lit, and it was wonderful, where the road curved downwards before us, to see this writhing serpent with the golden scales crawling before us in the darkness. And then, at last, we saw the formless mass of the huge Crawley elm looming before us in the gloom, and there was the broad village street with the glimmer of the cottage windows, and the high front of the old George Inn, glowing from every door and pane and crevice, in honour of the noble company who were to sleep within that night.

15. *Foul Play*

MY uncle's impatience would not suffer him to wait for the slow rotation which would bring us to the door, but he flung the reins and a crown-piece to one of the rough fellows who thronged the side-walk, and pushing his way vigorously through the crowd, he made for the entrance. As he came within the circle of

light thrown by the windows, a whisper ran round as to who this masterful gentleman with the pale face and the driving-coat might be, and a lane was formed to admit us. I had never before understood the popularity of my uncle in the sporting world, for the folk began to huzza as we passed with cries of "Hurrah for Buck Tregellis! Good luck to you and your man, Sir Charles! Clear a path for a bang-up noble Corinthian!" whilst the landlord, attracted by the shouting, came running out to greet us.

"Good evening, Sir Charles!" he cried. "I hope I see you well, sir, and I trust that you will find that your man does credit to the George."

"How is he?" asked my uncle, quickly.

"Never better, sir. Looks a picture, he does—and fit to fight for a kingdom."

My uncle gave a sigh of relief.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"He's gone to his room early, sir, seein' that he had some very partic'lar business to-morrow mornin'," said the landlord, grinning.

"Where is Belcher?"

"Here he is, in the bar-parlour."

He opened a door as he spoke, and looking in we saw a score of well-dressed men, some of whose faces had become familiar to me during my short West End career, seated round a table upon which stood a steaming soup-tureen filled with punch. At the further end, very much at his ease amongst the aristocrats and exquisites who surrounded him, sat the Champion of England, his superb figure thrown back in his chair, a flush upon his handsome face, and a loose red handkerchief knotted carelessly round his throat in the picturesque fashion which was long known by his name. Half a century has passed since then, and I have seen my share of fine men. Perhaps it is because I am a slight creature myself, but it is my peculiarity that I had rather look upon a splendid man than upon any work of Nature. Yet during all that time I have never seen a finer man than Jem Belcher, and if I

wish to match him in my memory, I can only turn to that other Jim whose fate and fortunes I am trying to lay before you.

There was a shout of jovial greeting when my uncle's face was seen in the doorway.

"Come in, Tregellis!" "We were expecting you!" "There's a devilled bladebone ordered." "What's the latest from London?" "What is the meaning of the long odds against your man?" "Have the folk gone mad?" "What the devil is it all about?" They were all talking at once.

"Excuse me, gentlemen," my uncle answered. "I shall be happy to give you any information in my power a little later. I have a matter of some slight importance to decide. Belcher, I would have a word with you!"

The Champion came out with us into the passage.

"Where is your man, Belcher?"

"He has gone to his room, sir. I believe that he should have a clear twelve hours' sleep before fighting."

"What sort of day has he had?"

"I did him lightly in the matter of exercise. Clubs, dumbbells, walking and a half-hour with the mufflers. He'll do us all proud, sir, or I'm a Dutchman! But what in the world's amiss with the betting? If I didn't know that he was as straight as a line, I'd ha' thought he was planning a cross and laying against himself."

"It's about that I've hurried down. I have good information, Belcher, that there has been a plot to cripple him, and that the rogues are so sure of success that they are prepared to lay anything against his appearance."

Belcher whistled between his teeth.

"I've seen no sign of anything of the kind, sir. No one has been near him or had speech with him, except only your nephew there and myself."

"Four villains, with Berks at their head, got the start of us by several hours. It was Warr who told me."

"What Bill Warr says is straight, and what Joe Berks does is crooked. Who were the others, sir?"

"Red Ike, Fighting Yussef and Chris McCarthy."

"A pretty gang, too! Well, sir, the lad is safe, but it would be as well, perhaps, for one or other of us to stay in his room with him. For my own part, as long as he's my charge I'm never very far away."

"It is a pity to wake him."

"He can hardly be asleep, with all this racket in the house. This way, sir, and down the passage!"

We passed along the low-roofed, devious corridors of the old-fashioned inn to the back of the house.

"This is my room, sir," said Belcher, nodding to a door upon the right. "This one upon the left is his." He threw it open as he spoke. "Here's Sir Charles Tregellis come to see you, Jim," said he; and then, "Good Lord, what is the meaning of this?"

The little chamber lay before us brightly illuminated by a brass lamp which stood upon the table. The bed-clothes had not been turned down, but there was an indentation upon the counterpane which showed that someone had lain there. One-half of the lattice window was swinging on its hinge and a cloth cap lying upon the table was the only sign of the occupant. My uncle looked round him and shook his head.

"It seems that we are too late," said he.

"That's his cap, sir. Where in the world can he have gone to with his head bare? I thought he was safe in his bed an hour ago. Jim! Jim!" he shouted.

"He has certainly gone through the window," cried my uncle. "I believe these villains have enticed him out by some devilish device of their own. Hold the lamp, nephew. Ha! I thought so. Here are his footmarks upon the flower-bed outside."

The landlord, and one or two of the Corinthians from the bar-parlour had followed us to the back of the house. Someone had opened the side door, and we found ourselves in the kitchen garden, where, clustering upon the gravel path, we were able to hold the lamp over the soft newly turned earth which lay between us and the window.

"That's his footmark!" said Belcher. "He wore his running boots this evening, and you can see the nails. But what's this? Someone else has been here."

"A woman!" I cried.

"By Heaven, you're right, nephew," said my uncle.

Belcher gave a hearty curse.

"He never had a word to say to any girl in the village. I took partic'lar notice of that. And to think of them coming in like this at the last moment!"

"It's clear as possible, Tregellis," said the Hon. Berkeley Craven, who was one of the company from the bar-parlour. "Whoever it was came outside the window and tapped. You see here, and here, the small feet have their toes to the house, while the others are all leading away. She came to summon him, and he followed her."

"That is perfectly certain," said my uncle. "There's not a moment to be lost. We must divide and search in different directions, unless we can get some clue as to where they have gone."

"There's only the one path out of the garden," cried the landlord, leading the way. "It opens out into this back lane, which leads up to the stables. The other end of the lane goes out into the side road."

The bright yellow glare from a stable lantern cut a ring suddenly from the darkness, and an ostler came lounging out of the yard.

"Who's that?" cried the landlord.

"It's me, master! Bill Shields."

"How long have you been there, Bill?"

"Well, master, I've been in an' out of the stables this hour back. We can't pack in another 'orse, and there's no use tryin'. I daren't 'ardly give them their feed, for, if they was to thicken out just ever so little——"

"See here, Bill. Be careful how you answer, for a mistake may cost you your place. Have you seen anyone pass down the lane?"

"There was a feller in a rabbit-skin cap some time ago. 'E was loiterin' about until I asked 'im what 'is

business was, for I didn't care about the looks of 'im, or the way that 'e was peepin' in at the windows. I turned the stable lantern on to 'im, but 'e ducked 'is face, an' I could only swear to 'is red 'ead."

I cast a quick glance at my uncle, and I saw that the shadow had deepened upon his face.

"What became of him?" he asked.

"'E slouched away, sir, an' I saw the last of 'im."

"You've seen no one else? You didn't, for example, see a woman and a man pass down the lane together?"

"No, sir."

"Or hear anything unusual?"

"Why, now that you mention it, sir, I did 'ear somethin'; but on a night like this, when all these London blades arc in the village——"

"What was it, then?" cried my uncle, impatiently.

"Well, sir, it was a kind of a cry out yonder as if someone 'ad got 'imself into trouble. I thought, maybe, two sparks were fightin', and I took no partic'lar notice."

"Where did it come from?"

"From the side road, yonder."

"Was it distant?"

"No, sir; I should say it didn't come from more'n two hundred yards."

"A single cry?"

"Well, it was a kind of screech, sir, and then I 'eard somebody drivin' very 'ard down the road. I remember thinking that it was strange that anyone should be driving away from Crawley on a great night like this."

My uncle seized the lantern from the fellow's hand, and we all trooped behind him down the lane. At the further end the road cut it across at right angles. Down this my uncle hastened, but his search was not a long one, for the glaring light fell suddenly upon something which brought a groan to my lips and a bitter curse to those of Jem Belcher. Along the white surface of the dusty highway there was drawn a long smear of crimson, while beside this ominous stain there lay a murderous little

pocket-bludgeon, such as Warr had described in the morning.

16. *Crawley Downs*

ALL through that weary night my uncle and I, with Belcher, Berkeley Craven and a dozen of the Corinthians, searched the country-side for some trace of our missing man, but save for that ill-boding splash upon the road not the slightest clue could be obtained as to what had befallen him. No one had seen or heard anything of him, and the single cry in the night of which the ostler told us was the only indication of the tragedy which had taken place. In small parties we scoured the country as far as East Grinstead and Bletchingley, and the sun had been long over the horizon before we found ourselves back at Crawley once more with heavy hearts and tired feet. My uncle, who had driven to Reigate in the hope of gaining some intelligence, did not return until past seven o'clock, and a glance at his face gave us the same black news which he gathered from ours.

We held a council round our dismal breakfast-table, to which Mr. Berkeley Craven was invited as a man of sound wisdom and large experience in matters of sport. Belcher was half frenzied by this sudden ending of all the pains which he had taken in the training, and could only rave out threats at Berks and his companions, with terrible menaces as to what he would do when he met them. My uncle sat grave and thoughtful, eating nothing and drumming his fingers upon the table, while my heart was heavy within me, and I could have sunk my face into my hands and burst into tears as I thought how powerless I was to aid my friend. Mr. Craven, a fresh-faced, alert man of the world, was the only one of us who seemed to preserve both his wits and his appetite.

"Let me see! The fight was to be at ten, was it not?" he asked.

" It was to be.'

" I dare say it will be, too. Never say die, Tregellis ! Your man has still three hours in which to come back."

My uncle shook his head.

" The villains have done their work too well for that, I fear," said he.

" Well, now, let us reason it out," said Berkeley Craven. " A woman comes and she coaxes this young man out of his room. Do you know any young woman who had an influence over him ? "

My uncle looked at me.

" No," said I. " I know of none."

" Well, we know that she came," said Berkeley Craven. " There can be no question as to that. She brought some piteous tale, no doubt, such as a gallant young man could hardly refuse to listen to. He fell into the trap, and allowed himself to be decoyed to the place where these rascals were waiting for him. We may take all that as proved, I should fancy, Tregellis."

" I see no better explanation," said my uncle.

" Well, then, it is obviously not the interest of these men to kill him. Warr heard them say as much. They could not make sure, perhaps, of doing so tough a young fellow an injury which would certainly prevent him from fighting. Even with a broken arm he might pull the fight off, as men have done before. There was too much money on for them to run any risks. They gave him a tap on the head, therefore, to prevent his making too much resistance, and they then drove him off to some farmhouse or stable, where they will hold him a prisoner until the time for the fight is over. I warrant that you see him before to-night as well as ever he was."

This theory sounded so reasonable that it seemed to lift a little of the weight from my heart, but I could see that from my uncle's point of view it was a poor consolation.

" I dare say you are right, Craven," said he.

" I am sure that I am."

"But it won't help us to win the fight."

"That's the point, sir," cried Belcher. "By the Lord, I wish they'd let me take his place, even with my left arm strapped behind me."

"I should advise you in any case to go to the ringside," said Craven. "You should hold on until the last moment in the hope of your man turning up."

"I shall certainly do so. And I shall protest against paying the wagers under such circumstances."

Craven shrugged his shoulders.

"You remember the conditions of the match," said he. "I fear it is pay or play. No doubt the point might be submitted to the referees, but I cannot doubt that they would have to give it against you."

We had sunk into a melancholy silence, when suddenly Belcher sprang up from the table.

"Hark!" he cried. "Listen to that!"

"What is it?" we cried, all three.

"The betting! Listen again!"

Out of the babel of voices and roaring of wheels outside the window a single sentence struck sharply on our ears.

"Even money upon Sir Charles's nominee!"

"Even money!" cried my uncle. "It was seven to one against me, yesterday. What is the meaning of this?"

"Even money either way," cried the voice again.

"There's somebody knows something," said Belcher, "and there's nobody has a better right to know what it is than we. Come on, sir, and we'll get to the bottom of it."

The village street was packed with people, for they had been sleeping twelve and fifteen in a room, whilst hundreds of gentlemen had spent the night in their carriages. So thick was the throng that it was no easy matter to get out of the George. A drunken man, snoring horribly in his breathing, was curled up in the passage, absolutely oblivious to the stream of people who flowed round and occasionally over him.

"What's the betting, boys?" asked Belcher, from the steps.

"Even money, Jem," cried several voices.

"It was long odds on Wilson when last I heard."

"Yes; but there came a man who laid freely the other way, and he started others taking the odds, until now you can get even money."

"Who started it?"

"Why, that's he! The man that lies drunk in the passage. He's been pouring it down like water ever since he drove in at six o'clock, so it's no wonder he's like that."

Belcher stooped down and turned over the man's inert head so as to show his features.

"He's a stranger to me, sir."

"And to me," added my uncle.

"But not to me," I cried. "It's John Cumming, the landlord of the inn at Friar's Oak. I've known him ever since I was a boy, and I can't be mistaken."

"Well, what the devil can *he* know about it?" said Craven.

"Nothing at all, in all probability," answered my uncle. "He is backing young Jim because he knows him, and because he has more brandy than sense. His drunken confidence set others to do the same, and so the odds came down."

"He was as sober as a judge when he drove in here this morning," said the landlord. "He began backing Sir Charles's nominee from the moment he arrived. Some of the other boys took the office from him, and they very soon brought the odds down amongst them."

"I wish he had not brought himself down as well," said my uncle. "I beg that you will bring me a little lavender water, landlord, for the smell of this crowd is appalling. I suppose you could not get any sense from this drunken fellow, nephew, or find out what it is he knows."

It was in vain that I rocked him by the shoulder and

shouted his name in his ear. Nothing could break in upon that serene intoxication.

"Well, it's a unique situation as far as my experience goes," said Berkeley Craven. "Here we are within a couple of hours of the fight, and yet you don't know whether you have a man to represent you. I hope you don't stand to lose very much, Tregellis."

My uncle shrugged his shoulders carelessly, and took a pinch of his snuff with that inimitable sweeping gesture which no man has ever ventured to imitate.

"Pretty well, my boy!" said he. "But it is time that we thought of going up to the Downs. This night journey has left me just a little *effleuré*, and I should like half an hour of privacy to arrange my toilet. If this is my last kick, it shall at least be with a well-brushed boot."

I have heard a traveller from the wilds of America say that he looked upon the Red Indian and the English gentleman as closely akin, citing the passion for sport, the aloofness and the suppression of the emotions in each. I thought of his words as I watched my uncle that morning, for I believe that no victim tied to the stake could have had a worse outlook before him. It was not merely that his own fortunes were largely at stake, but it was the dreadful position in which he would stand before this immense concourse of people, many of whom had put their money upon his judgment, if he should find himself at the last moment with an impotent excuse instead of a champion to put before them. What a situation for a man who prided himself upon his aplomb, and upon bringing all that he undertook to the very highest standard of success! I, who knew him well, could tell from his wan cheeks and his restless fingers that he was at his wit's ends what to do; but no stranger who observed his jaunty bearing, the flecking of his laced handkerchief, the handling of his quizzing glass, or the shooting of his ruffles, would ever have thought that this butterfly creature could have had a care upon earth.

It was close upon nine o'clock when we were ready to

start for the Downs, and by that time my uncle's curricle was almost the only vehicle left in the village street. The night before they had lain with their wheels interlocking and their shafts under each other's bodies, as thick as they could fit, from the old church to the Crawley Elm, spanning the road five-deep for a good half-mile in length. Now the grey village street lay before us almost deserted save by a few women and children. Men, horses, carriages—all were gone. My uncle drew on his driving gloves and arranged his costume with punctilious neatness; but I observed that he glanced up and down the road with a haggard and yet expectant eye before he took his seat. I sat behind with Belcher, while the Hon. Berkeley Craven took the place beside him.

The road from Crawley curves gently upwards to the upland heather-clad plateau which extends for many miles in every direction. Strings of pedestrians, most of them so weary and dust-covered that it was evident that they had walked the thirty miles from London during the night, were plodding along by the sides of the road or trailing over the long mottled slopes of the moorland. A horseman, fantastically dressed in green and splendidly mounted, was waiting at the cross-roads, and as he spurred towards us I recognised the dark, handsome face and bold black eyes of Mendoza.

"I am waiting here to give the office, Sir Charles," said he. "It's down the Grinstead road, half a mile to the left."

"Very good," said my uncle, reining his mares round into the cross-road.

"You haven't got your man there," remarked Mendoza with something of suspicion in his manner.

"What the devil is that to you?" cried Belcher, furiously.

"It's a good deal to all of us, for there are some funny stories about."

"You keep them to yourself, then, or you may wish you had never heard them."

"All right, Jem! Your breakfast don't seem to have agreed with you this morning."

"Have the others arrived?" asked my uncle, carelessly.

"Not yet, Sir Charles. But Tom Oliver is there with the ropes and stakes. Jackson drove by just now, and most of the ring-keepers are up."

"We have still an hour," remarked my uncle, as he drove on. "It is possible that the others may be late, since they have to come from Reigate."

"You take it like a man, Tregellis," said Craven.

"We must keep a bold face and brazen it out until the last moment."

"Of course, sir," cried Belcher. "I'll never believe the betting would rise like that if somebody didn't know something. We'll hold on by our teeth and nails, Sir Charles, and see what comes of it."

We could hear a sound like the waves upon the beach, long before we came in sight of that mighty multitude, and then at last, on a sudden dip of the road, we saw it lying before us, a whirlpool of humanity with an open vortex in the centre. All round, the thousands of carriages and horses were dotted over the moor, and the slopes were gay with tents and booths. A spot had been chosen for the ring, where a great basin had been hollowed out in the ground, so that all round that natural amphitheatre a crowd of thirty thousand people could see very well what was going on in the centre. As we drove up a buzz of greeting came from the people upon the fringe which was nearest to us, spreading and spreading, until the whole multitude had joined in the acclamation. Then an instant later a second shout broke forth, beginning from the other side of the arena, and the faces which had been turned towards us whisked round, so that in a twinkling the whole foreground changed from white to dark.

"It's they. They are in time," said my uncle and Craven together.

Standing up on our curricle, we could see the cavalcade approaching over the Downs. In front came a huge yellow barouche, in which sat Sir Lothian Hume, Crab Wilson, and Captain Barclay, his trainer. The postilions were flying canary-yellow ribands from their caps, those being the colours under which Wilson was to fight. Behind the carriage there rode a hundred or more noblemen and gentlemen of the west country, and then a line of gigs, tilburies and carriages wound away down the Grinstead road as far as our eyes could follow it. The big barouche came lumbering over the sward in our direction until Sir Lothian Hume caught sight of us, when he shouted to his postilions to pull up.

"Good morning, Sir Charles," said he, springing out of the carriage. "I thought I knew your scarlet curricle. We have an excellent morning for the battle."

My uncle bowed coldly, and made no answer.

"I suppose that since we are all here we may begin at once," said Sir Lothian, taking no notice of the other's manner.

"We begin at ten o'clock. Not an instant before."

"Very good, if you prefer it. By the way, Sir Charles, where is your man?"

"I would ask *you* that question, Sir Lothian," answered my uncle. "Where is my man?"

A look of astonishment passed over Sir Lothian's features, which, if it were not real, was most admirably affected.

"What do you mean by asking me such a question?"

"Because I wish to know."

"But how can I tell, and what business is it of mine?"

"I have reason to believe that you have made it your business."

"If you would kindly put the matter a little more clearly there would be some possibility of my understanding you."

They were both very white and cold, formal and unimpassioned in their bearing, but exchanging glances

which crossed like rapier blades. I thought of Sir Lothian's murderous repute as a duellist, and I trembled for my uncle.

"Now, sir, if you imagine that you have a grievance against me, you will oblige me vastly by putting it into words."

"I will," said my uncle. "There has been a conspiracy to maim or kidnap my man, and I have every reason to believe that you are privy to it."

An ugly sneer came over Sir Lothian's saturnine face.

"I see," said he. "Your man has not come on quite as well as you had expected in his training, and you are hard put to it to invent an excuse. Still, I should have thought that you might have found a more probable one, and one which would entail less serious consequences."

"Sir," answered my uncle, "you are a liar, but how great a liar you are nobody knows save yourself."

Sir Lothian's hollow cheeks grew white with passion, and I saw for an instant in his deep-set eyes such a glare as comes from the frenzied hound rearing and ramping at the end of its chain. Then, with an effort, he became the same cold, hard, self-contained man as ever.

"It does not become our position to quarrel like two yokels at a fair," said he; "we shall go further into the matter afterwards."

"I promise you that we shall," answered my uncle, grimly.

"Meanwhile, I hold you to the terms of your wager. Unless you produce your nominee within five-and-twenty minutes, I claim the match."

"Eight-and-twenty minutes," said my uncle, looking at his watch. "You may claim it then, but not an instant before."

He was admirable at that moment, for his manner was that of a man with all sorts of hidden resources, so that I could hardly make myself realise as I looked at him that our position was really as desperate as I knew it to be. In the meantime Berkeley Craven, who had been ex-

changing a few words with Sir Lothian Hume, came back to our side.

"I have been asked to be sole referee in this matter," said he. "Does that meet with your wishes, Sir Charles?"

"I shall be vastly obliged to you, Craven, if you will undertake the duties."

"And Jackson has been suggested as timekeeper."

"I could not wish a better one."

"Very good. That is settled."

In the meantime the last of the carriages had come up, and the horses had all been picketed upon the moor. The stragglers who had dotted the grass had closed in until the huge crowd was one unit with a single mighty voice, which was already beginning to bellow its impatience. Looking round, there was hardly a moving object upon the whole vast expanse of green and purple down. A belated gig was coming at full gallop down the road which led from the south, and a few pedestrians were still trailing up from Crawley, but nowhere was there a sign of the missing man.

"The betting keeps up for all that," said Belcher. "I've just been to the ring-side, and it is still even."

"There's a place for you at the outer ropes, Sir Charles," said Craven.

"There is no sign of my man yet. I won't come in until he arrives."

"It is my duty to tell you that only ten minutes are left."

"I make it five," cried Sir Lothian Hume.

"That is a question which lies with the referee," said Craven, firmly. "My watch makes it ten minutes, and ten it must be."

"Here's Crab Wilson!" cried Belcher, and at the same moment a shout like a thunderclap burst from the crowd. The west-countryman had emerged from his dressing-tent, followed by Dutch Sam and Tom Owen, who were acting as his seconds. He was nude to the

waist, with a pair of white calico drawers, white silk stockings, and running shoes. Round his middle was a canary-yellow sash, and dainty little ribbons of the same colour fluttered from the sides of his knees. He carried a high white hat in his hand, and running down the lane which had been kept open through the crowd to allow persons to reach the ring, he threw the hat high into the air, so that it fell within the staked enclosure. Then with a double spring he cleared the outer and inner line of rope, and stood with his arms folded in the centre.

I do not wonder that the people cheered. Even Belcher could not help joining in the general shout of applause. He was certainly a splendidly built young athlete, and one could not have wished to look upon a finer sight as his white skin, sleek and luminous as a panther's, gleamed in the light of the morning sun, with a beautiful liquid rippling of muscles at every movement. His arms were long and slingy, his shoulders loose and yet powerful, with the downward slant which is a surer index of power than squareness can be. He clasped his hands behind his head, threw them aloft, and swung them backwards, and at every movement some fresh expanse of his smooth, white skin became knobbed and gnarled with muscles, whilst a yell of admiration and delight from the crowd greeted each fresh exhibition. Then, folding his arms once more, he stood like a beautiful statue waiting for his antagonist.

Sir Lothian Hume had been looking impatiently at his watch, and now he shut it with a triumphant snap.

"Time's up!" he cried. "The match is forfeit."

"Time is not up," said Craven.

"I have still five minutes." My uncle looked round with despairing eyes.

"Only three, Tregellis!"

A deep angry murmur was rising from the crowd. "It's a cross! It's a cross! It's a fake!" was the cry.

"Two minutes, Tregellis!"

"Where's your man, Sir Charles? Where's the man

that we have backed ? " Flushed faces began to crane over each other and angry eyes glared up at us.

" One more minute, Tregellis ! I am very sorry, but it will be my duty to declare it forfeit against you."

There was a sudden swirl in the crowd, a rush, a shout, and high up in the air there spun an old black hat, floating over the heads of the ring-siders and flickering down within the ropes.

" Saved, by the Lord ! " screamed Belcher.

" I rather fancy," said my uncle, calmly, " that this must be my man."

" Too late ! " cried Sir Lothian.

" No," answered the referee. " It was still twenty seconds to the hour. The fight will now proceed."

17. *The Ring-side*

OUT of the whole of that vast multitude I was one of the very few who had observed whence it was that this black hat, skimming so opportunely over the ropes, had come. I have already remarked that when we looked around us there had been a single gig travelling very rapidly upon the southern road. My uncle's eyes had rested upon it, but his attention had been drawn away by the discussion between Sir Lothian Hume and the referee upon the question of time. For my own part, I had been so struck by the furious manner in which these belated travellers were approaching, that I had continued to watch them with all sorts of vague hopes within me, which I did not dare to put into words for fear of adding to my uncle's disappointments. I had just made out that the gig contained a man and a woman, when suddenly I saw it swerve off the road, and come with a galloping horse and bounding wheels right across the moor, crashing through the gorse bushes, and sinking down to the hubs in the heather and bracken. As the driver pulled up his foam-spattered horse, he threw the

reins to his companion, sprang from his seat, butted furiously into the crowd, and then an instant afterwards up went the hat which told of his challenge and defiance.

"There is no hurry now, I presume, Craven," said my uncle, as coolly as if this sudden effect had been carefully devised by him.

"Now that your man has his hat in the ring you can take as much time as you like, Sir Charles."

"Your friend has certainly cut it rather fine, nephew."

"It is not Jim, sir," I whispered. "It is someone else."

My uncle's eyebrows betrayed his astonishment.

"Someone else!" he ejaculated.

"And a good man too!" roared Belcher, slapping his thigh with a crack like a pistol-shot. "Why, blow my dickey if it ain't old Jack Harrison himself!"

Looking down at the crowd, we had seen the head and shoulders of a powerful and strenuous man moving slowly forward, and leaving behind him a long V-shaped ripple upon its surface like the wake of a swimming dog. Now, as he pushed his way through the looser fringe the head was raised, and there was the grinning, hardy face of the smith looking up at us. He had left his hat in the ring, and was enveloped in an overcoat with a blue bird's-eye handkerchief tied round his neck. As he emerged from the throng he let his great-coat fly loose, and showed that he was dressed in his full fighting kit—black drawers, chocolate stockings, and white shoes.

"I'm right sorry to be so late, Sir Charles," he cried. "I'd have been sooner, but it took me a little time to make it all straight with the missus. I couldn't convince her all at once, an' so I brought her with me, and we argued it out on the way."

Looking at the gig, I saw that it was indeed Mrs. Harrison who was seated in it. Sir Charles beckoned him up to the wheel of the curricle.

"What in the world brings you here, Harrison?" he whispered. "I am as glad to see you as ever I was

to see a man in my life, but I confess that I did not expect you."

"Well, sir, you heard I was coming," said the smith.

"Indeed, I did not."

"Didn't you get a message, Sir Charles, from a man named Cumming, landlord of the Friar's Oak Inn? Mister Rodney there would know him."

"We saw him dead drunk at the George."

"There, now, if I wasn't afraid of it!" cried Harrison, angrily. "He's always like that when he's excited, and I never saw a man more off his head than he was when he heard I was going to take this job over. He brought a bag of sovereigns up with him to back me with."

"That's how the betting got turned," said my uncle. "He found others to follow his lead, it appears."

"I was so afraid that he might get upon the drink that I made him promise to go straight to you, sir, the very instant he should arrive. He had a note to deliver."

"I understand that he reached the George at six, whilst I did not return from Reigate until after seven, by which time I have no doubt that he had drunk his message to me out of his head. But where is your nephew Jim, and how did you come to know that you would be needed?"

"It is not his fault, I promise you, that you should be left in the lurch. As to me, I had my orders to take his place from the only man upon earth whose word I have never disobeyed."

"Yes, Sir Charles," said Mrs. Harrison, who had left the gig and approached us. "You can make the most of it this time, for never again shall you have my Jack—not if you were to go on your knees for him."

"She's not a patron of sport, and that's a fact," said the smith.

"Sport!" she cried with shrill contempt and anger. "Tell me when all is over."

She hurried away, and I saw her afterwards seated amongst the bracken, her back turned towards the multi-

tude, and her hands over her ears, cowering and wincing in an agony of apprehension.

Whilst this hurried scene had been taking place, the crowd had become more and more tumultuous, partly from their impatience at the delay, and partly from their exuberant spirits at the unexpected chance of seeing so celebrated a fighting man as Harrison. His identity had already been noised abroad, and many an elderly connoisseur plucked his long net-purse out of his fob, in order to put a few guineas upon the man who would represent the school of the past against the present. The younger men were still in favour of the west-countryman, and small odds were to be had either way in proportion to the number of the supporters of each in the different parts of the crowd.

In the meantime Sir Lothian Hume had come bustling up to the Honourable Berkeley Craven, who was still standing near our curricle.

"I beg to lodge a formal protest against these proceedings," said he.

"On what grounds, sir?"

"Because the man produced is not the original nominee of Sir Charles Tregellis."

"I never named one, as you are well aware," said my uncle.

"The betting has all been upon the understanding that young Jim Harrison was my man's opponent. Now, at the last moment, he is withdrawn and another and more formidable man put into his place."

"Sir Charles Tregellis is quite within his rights," said Craven, firmly. "He undertook to produce a man who should be within the age limits stipulated, and I understand that Harrison fulfils all the conditions. You are over five-and-thirty, Harrison?"

"Forty-one next month, master."

"Very good. I direct that the fight proceed."

But, alas! there was one authority which was higher even than that of the referee, and we were destined to an

experience which was the prelude, and sometimes the conclusion also, of many an old-time fight. Across the moor there had ridden a black-coated gentleman, with buff-topped hunting boots and a couple of grooms behind him, the little knot of horsemen showing up clearly upon the curving swells and then dipping down into the alternate hollows. Some of the more observant of the crowd had glanced suspiciously at this advancing figure, but the majority had not observed him at all until he reined up his horse upon a knoll which overlooked the amphitheatre, and in a stentorian voice announced that he represented the *Custos rotulorum* of His Majesty's county of Sussex, that he proclaimed this assembly to be gathered together for an illegal purpose, and that he was commissioned to disperse it by force, if necessary.

Never before had I understood that deep-seated fear and wholesome respect which many centuries of bludgeoning at the hands of the law had beaten into the fierce and turbulent natives of these islands. Here was a man with two attendants upon one side, and on the other thirty thousand very angry and disappointed people, many of them fighters by profession, and some from the roughest and most dangerous classes in the country. And yet it was the single man who appealed confidently to force, whilst the huge multitude swayed and murmured like a mutinous fierce-willed creature brought face to face with a power against which it knew that there was neither argument nor resistance. My uncle, however, with Berkeley Craven, Sir John Lade, and a dozen other lords and gentlemen, hurried across to the interrupter of the sport.

"I presume that you have a warrant, sir?" said Craven.

"Yes, sir, I have a warrant."

"Then I have a legal right to inspect it."

The magistrate handed him a blue paper which the little knot of gentlemen clustered their heads over, for they were mostly magistrates themselves, and were

keenly alive to any possible flaw in the wording. At last Craven shrugged his shoulders, and handed it back.

"This seems to be correct, sir," said he.

"It is entirely correct," answered the magistrate, affably. "To prevent waste of your valuable time, gentlemen, I may say, once for all, that it is my unalterable determination that no fight shall, under any circumstances, be brought off in the county over which I have control, and I am prepared to follow you all day in order to prevent it."

To my inexperience this appeared to bring the whole matter to a conclusion, but I had underrated the foresight of those who arrange these affairs, and also the advantages which made Crawley Down so favourite a rendezvous. There was a hurried consultation between the principals, the backers, the referee and the time-keeper.

"It's seven miles to Hampshire border and about two to Surrey," said Jackson. The famous Master of the Ring was clad in honour of the occasion in a most resplendent scarlet coat worked in gold at the button-holes, a white stock, a looped hat with a broad black band, buff knee-breeches, white silk stockings and paste buckles —a costume which did justice to his magnificent figure, and especially to those famous "balustrade" calves which had helped him to be the finest runner and jumper as well as the most formidable pugilist in England. His hard, high-boned face, large piercing eyes, and immense physique made him a fitting leader for that rough and tumultuous body who had named him as their commander-in-chief.

"If I might venture to offer you a word of advice," said the affable official, "it would be to make for the Hampshire line, for Sir James Ford, on the Surrey border, has as great an objection to such assemblies as I have, whilst Mr. Merridew, of Long Hall, who is the Hampshire magistrate, has fewer scruples upon the point."

"Sir," said my uncle, raising his hat in his most

impressive manner, "I am infinitely obliged to you. With the referee's permission, there is nothing for it but to shift the stakes."

In an instant a scene of the wildest animation had set in. Tom Owen and his assistant, Fogo, with the help of the ring-keepers, plucked up the stakes and ropes, and carried them off across country. Crab Wilson was enveloped in greatcoats, and borne away in the barouche, whilst Champion Harrison took Mr. Craven's place in our curricle. Then off the huge crowd started, horsemen, vehicles and pedestrians, rolling slowly over the broad face of the moorland. The carriages rocked and pitched like boats in a seaway, as they lumbered along, fifty abreast, scrambling and lurching over everything which came in their way. Sometimes, with a snap and a thud, one axle would come to the ground, whilst a wheel reeled off amidst the tussocks of heather, and roars of delight greeted the owners as they looked ruefully at the ruin. Then as the gorse clumps grew thinner, and the sward more level, those on foot began to run, the riders struck in their spurs, the drivers cracked their whips, and away they all streamed in the maddest, wildest cross-country steeple-chase, the yellow barouche and the crimson curricle, which held the two champions, leading the van.

"What do you think of your chances, Harrison?" I heard my uncle ask, as the two mares picked their way over the broken ground.

"It's my last fight, Sir Charles," said the smith. "You heard the missus say that if she let me off this time I was never to ask again. I must try and make it a good one."

"But your training?"

"I'm always in training, sir. I work hard from morning to night, and I drink little else than water. I don't think that Captain Barclay can do much better with all his rules."

"He's rather long in the reach for you."

"I've fought and beat them that were longer. If it

comes to a rally I should hold my own, and I should have the better of him at a throw."

"It's a match of youth against experience. Well, I would not hedge a guinea of my money. But, unless he was acting under force, I cannot forgive young Jim for having deserted me."

"He *was* acting under force, Sir Charles."

"You have seen him, then?"

"No, master, I have not seen him."

"You know where he is?"

"Well, it is not for me to say one way or the other. I can only tell you that he could not help himself. But here's the beak a-comin' for us again."

The ominous figure galloped up once more alongside of our curricle, but this time his mission was a more amiable one.

"My jurisdiction ends at that ditch, sir," said he. "I should fancy that you could hardly wish a better place for a mill than the sloping field beyond. I am quite sure that no one will interfere with you there."

His anxiety that the fight should be brought off was in such contrast to the zeal with which he had chased us from his county, that my uncle could not help remarking upon it.

"It is not for a magistrate to wink at the breaking of the law, sir," he answered. "But if my colleague of Hampshire has no scruples about its being brought off within his jurisdiction, I should very much like to see the fight," with which he spurred his horse up an adjacent knoll, from which he thought that he might gain the best view of the proceedings.

And now I had a view of all those points of etiquette and curious survivals of custom which are so recent, that we have not yet appreciated that they may some day be as interesting to the social historian as they then were to the sportsman. A dignity was given to the contest by a rigid code of ceremony, just as the clash of mail-clad knights was prefaced and adorned by the calling of the

heralds and the showing of blazoned shields. To many in those ancient days the tourney may have seemed a bloody and brutal ordeal, but we who look at it with ample perspective see that it was a rude but gallant preparation for the conditions of life in an iron age. And so also, when the Ring has become as extinct as the lists, we may understand that a broader philosophy would show that all things, which spring up so naturally and spontaneously, have a function to fulfil, and that it is a less evil that two men should, of their own free will, fight until they can fight no more, than that the standard of hardihood and endurance should run the slightest risk of being lowered in a nation which depends so largely upon the individual qualities of her citizens for her defence. Do away with war, if the cursed thing can by any wit of man be avoided, but until you see your way to that, have a care in meddling with those primitive qualities to which at any moment you may have to appeal for your own protection.

Tom Owen and his singular assistant, Fogo, who combined the functions of prize-fighter and of poet, though, fortunately for himself, he could use his fists better than his pen, soon had the ring arranged according to the rules then in vogue. The white wooden posts, each with the P.C. of the pugilistic club printed upon it, were so fixed as to leave a square of 24 feet within the roped enclosure. Outside this ring an outer one was pitched, eight feet separating the two. The inner was for the combatants and for their seconds, while in the outer there were places for the referee, the timekeeper, the backers, and a few select and fortunate individuals, of whom, through being in my uncle's company, I was one. Some twenty well-known prize-fighters, including my friend Bill Warr, Black Richmond, Maddox, The Pride of Westminster, Tom Belcher, Paddington Jones, Tough Tom Blake, Symonds the ruffian, Tyne the tailor and others, were stationed in the outer ring as beaters. These fellows all wore the high white hats which were at that

time much affected by the Fancy, and they were armed with horse-whips, silver-mounted, and each bearing the P.C. monogram. Did anyone, be it East End rough or West End patrician, intrude within the outer ropes, this corps of guardians neither argued nor expostulated, but they fell upon the offender and laced him with their whips until he escaped back out of the forbidden ground. Even with so formidable a guard and such fierce measures, the beaters-out, who had to check the forward heaves of a maddened, straining crowd, were often as exhausted at the end of a fight as the principals themselves. In the meantime they formed up in a line of sentinels, presenting under their row of white hats every type of fighting face, from the fresh boyish countenances of Tom Belcher, Jones, and the other younger recruits, to the scarred and mutilated visages of the veteran bruisers.

Whilst the business of the fixing of the stakes and the fastening of the ropes was going forward, I from my place of vantage could hear the talk of the crowd behind me, the front two rows of which were lying upon the grass, the next two kneeling, and the others standing, in serried ranks all up the side of the gently sloping hill, so that each line could just see over the shoulders of that which was in front. There were several, and those amongst the most experienced, who took the gloomiest view of Harrison's chances, and it made my heart heavy to overhear them.

"It's the old story over again," said one. "They won't bear in mind that youth will be served. They only learn wisdom when it's knocked into them."

"Aye, aye," responded another. "That's how Jack Slack thrashed Broughton, and I myself saw Hooper, the tinman, beat to pieces by the fighting oilman. They all come to it in time, and now it's Harrison's turn."

"Don't you be so sure about that!" cried a third. "I've seen Jack Harrison fight five times, and I never yet saw him have the worst of it. He's a slaughterer, and so I tell you."

"He was, you mean."

"Well, I don't see no such difference as all that comes to, and I'm putting ten guineas on my opinion."

"Why," said a loud, consequential man from immediately behind me, speaking with a broad western burr, "vrom what I've zeen of this young Gloucester lad, I doan't think Harrison could have stood bevore him for ten rounds when he vas in his prime. I vas coming up in the Bristol coach yesterday, and the guard he told me that he had vifteen thousand pound in hard gold in the boot that had been zent up to back our man."

"They'll be in luck if they see their money again," said another. "Harrison's no lady's-maid fighter, and he's blood to the bone. He'd have a shy at it if his man was as big as Carlton House."

"Tut," answered the west-countryman. "It's only in Bristol and Gloucester that you can get men to beat Bristol and Gloucester."

"It's like your damned himpudence to say so," said an angry voice from the throng behind him. "There are six men in London that would hengage to walk round the best twelve that hever came from the west."

The proceedings might have opened by an impromptu bye-battle between the indignant cockney and the gentleman from Bristol, but a prolonged roar of applause broke in upon their altercation. It was caused by the appearance in the ring of Crab Wilson, followed by Dutch Sam and Mendoza carrying the basin, sponge, brandy-bladder and other badges of their office. As he entered Wilson pulled the canary-yellow handkerchief from his waist, and going to the corner post, he tied it to the top of it, where it remained fluttering in the breeze. He then took a bundle of smaller ribands of the same colour from his seconds, and walking round, he offered them to the noblemen and Corinthians at half-a-guinea apiece as souvenirs of the fight. His brisk trade was only brought to an end by the appearance of Harrison, who climbed in a very leisurely manner over the ropes, as

befitted his more mature years and less elastic joints. The yell which greeted him was even more enthusiastic than that which had heralded Wilson, and there was a louder ring of admiration in it, for the crowd had already had their opportunity of seeing Wilson's physique, whilst Harrison's was a surprise to them.

I had often looked upon the mighty arms and neck of the smith, but I had never before seen him stripped to the waist, or understood the marvellous symmetry of development which had made him in his youth the favourite model of the London sculptors. There was none of that white sleek skin and shimmering play of sinew which made Wilson a beautiful picture, but in its stead there was a rugged grandeur of knotted and tangled muscle, as though the roots of some old tree were writhing from breast to shoulder, and from shoulder to elbow. Even in repose the sun threw shadows from the curves of his skin, but when he exerted himself every muscle bunched itself up, distinct and hard, breaking his whole trunk into gnarled knots of sinew. His skin, on face and body, was darker and harsher than that of his youthful antagonist, but he looked tougher and harder, an effect which was increased by the sombre colour of his stockings and breeches. He entered the ring, sucking a lemon, with Jem Belcher and Caleb Baldwin, the coster, at his heels. Strolling across to the post, he tied his blue bird's-eye handkerchief over the west-countryman's yellow, and then walked to his opponent with his hand out.

"I hope I see you well, Wilson," said he.

"Pretty tidy, I thank you," answered the other. "We'll speak to each other in a different vashion, I 'spects, afore we part."

"But no ill-feeling," said the smith, and the two fighting men grinned at each other as they took their own corners.

"May I ask, Mr. Referee, whether these two men have been weighed?" asked Sir Lothian Hume, standing up in the outer ring.

"Their weight has just been taken under my supervision, sir," answered Mr. Craven. "Your man brought the scale down at thirteen-three, and Harrison at thirteen-eight."

"He's a fifteen stoner from the loins upwards," cried Dutch Sam from his corner.

"We'll get some of it off him before we finish."

"You'll get more off him than ever you bargained for," answered Jem Belcher, and the crowd laughed at the rough chaff.

18. *The Smith's Last Battle*

"CLEAR the outer ring!" cried Jackson, standing up beside the ropes with a big silver watch in his hand.

"Ss-whack! ss-whack! ss-whack!" went the horse-whips—for a number of the spectators, either driven onwards by the pressure behind or willing to risk some physical pain on the chance of getting a better view, had crept under the ropes and formed a ragged fringe within the outer ring. Now, amidst roars of laughter from the crowd and a shower of blows from the beaters-out, they dived madly back, with the ungainly haste of frightened sheep blundering through a gap in their hurdles. Their case was a hard one, for the folk in front refused to yield an inch of their places—but the arguments from the rear prevailed over everything else, and presently every frantic fugitive had been absorbed, whilst the beaters-out took their stands along the edge at regular intervals, with their whips held down by their thighs.

"Gentlemen," cried Jackson, again, "I am requested to inform you that Sir Charles Tregellis's nominee is Jack Harrison, fighting at thirteen-eight, and Sir Lothian Hume's is Crab Wilson, at thirteen-three. No person can be allowed at the inner ropes save the referee and the time-keeper. I have only to beg that, if the occasion

should require it, you will all give me your assistance to keep the ground clear, to prevent confusion and to have a fair fight. All ready ? "

" All ready ? " from both corners.

" Time ! "

There was a breathless hush as Harrison, Wilson, Belcher and Dutch Sam walked very briskly into the centre of the ring. The two men shook hands, whilst their seconds did the same, the four hands crossing each other. Then the seconds dropped back, and the two champions stood toe to toe, with their hands up.

It was a magnificent sight to anyone who had not lost his sense of appreciation of the noblest of all the works of Nature. Both men fulfilled that requisite of the powerful athlete that they should look larger without their clothes than with them. In Ring slang, they buffed well. And each showed up the other's points on account of the extreme contrast between them : the long, loose-limbed, deer-footed youngster, and the square-set, rugged veteran with his trunk like the stump of an oak. The betting began to rise upon the younger man from the instant that they were put face to face, for his advantages were obvious, whilst those qualities which had brought Harrison to the top in his youth were only a memory in the minds of the older men. All could see the three inches extra of height and two of reach which Wilson possessed, and a glance at the quick, cat-like motions of his feet, and the perfect poise of his body upon his legs, showed how swiftly he could spring either in or out from his slower adversary. But it took a subtler insight to read the grim smile which flickered over the smith's mouth, or the smouldering fire which shone in his grey eyes, and it was only the old-timers who knew that, with his mighty heart and his iron frame, he was a perilous man to lay odds against.

Wilson stood in the position from which he had derived his nickname, his left hand and left foot well to the front, his body sloped very far back from his loins, and his guard

thrown across his chest, but held well forward in a way which made him exceedingly hard to get at. The smith, on the other hand, assumed the obsolete attitude which Humphries and Mendoza introduced, but which had not for ten years been seen in a first-class battle. Both his knees were slightly bent, he stood square to his opponent, and his two big brown fists were held over his mark so that he could lead equally with either. Wilson's hands, which moved incessantly in and out, had been stained with some astringent juice with the purpose of preventing them from puffing, and so great was the contrast between them and his white fore-arms, that I imagined that he was wearing dark, close-fitting gloves until my uncle explained the matter in a whisper. So they stood in a quiver of eagerness and expectation, whilst that huge multitude hung so silently and breathlessly upon every motion that they might have believed themselves to be alone, man to man, in the centre of some primeval solitude.

It was evident from the beginning that Crab Wilson meant to throw no chance away, and that he would trust to his lightness of foot and quickness of hand until he should see something of the tactics of this rough-looking antagonist. He paced swiftly round several times, with little, elastic, menacing steps, whilst the smith pivoted slowly to correspond. Then, as Wilson took a backward step to induce Harrison to break his ground and follow him, the older man grinned and shook his head.

"You must come to me, lad," said he. "I'm too old to scamper round the ring after you. But we have the day before us, and I'll wait."

He may not have expected his invitation to be so promptly answered; but in an instant, with a panther spring, the west-countryman was on him. Smack! smack! smack! Thud! thud! The first three were on Harrison's face, the last two were heavy counters upon Wilson's body. Back danced the youngster, disengaging himself in beautiful style, but with two angry red blotches

over the lower line of his ribs. "Blood for Wilson!" yelled the crowd, and as the smith faced round to follow the movements of his nimble adversary, I saw with a thrill that his chin was crimson and dripping. In came Wilson again with a feint at the mark and a flush hit on Harrison's cheek; then, breaking the force of the smith's ponderous right counter, he brought the round to a conclusion by slipping down upon the grass.

"First knock-down for Harrison!" roared a thousand voices, for ten times as many pounds would change hands upon the point.

"I appeal to the referee!" cried Sir Lothian Hume. "It was a slip, and not a knock-down."

"I give it a slip," said Berkeley Craven, and the men walked to their corners, amidst a general shout of applause for a spirited and well-contested opening round. Harrison fumbled in his mouth with his finger and thumb, and then with a sharp half-turn he wrenched out a tooth, which he threw into the basin. "Quite like old times," said he to Belcher.

"Have a care, Jack!" whispered the anxious second. "You got rather more than you gave."

"Maybe I can carry more, too," said he serenely, whilst Caleb Baldwin mopped the big sponge over his face, and the shining bottom of the tin basin ceased suddenly to glimmer through the water.

I could gather from the comments of the experienced Corinthians around me, and from the remarks of the crowd behind, that Harrison's chance was thought to have been lessened by this round.

"I've seen his old faults, and I haven't seen his old merits," said Sir John Lade, our opponent of the Brighton Road. "He's as slow on his feet and with his guard as ever. Wilson hit him as he liked."

"Wilson may hit him three times to his once, but his one is worth Wilson's three," remarked my uncle. "He's a natural fighter and the other an excellent sparrer, but I don't hedge a guinea."

A sudden hush announced that the men were on their feet again, and so skilfully had the seconds done their work, that neither looked a jot the worse for what had passed. Wilson led viciously with his left, but misjudged his distance, receiving a smashing counter on the mark in reply which sent him reeling and gasping to the ropes. "Hurrah for the old one!" yelled the mob, and my uncle laughed and nudged Sir John Lade. The west-countryman smiled, and shook himself like a dog from the water as with a stealthy step he came back to the centre of the ring, where his man was still standing. Bang came Harrison's right upon the mark once more, but Crab broke the blow with his elbow, and jumped laughing away. Both men were a little winded, and their quick, high breathing, with the light patter of their feet as they danced round each other, blended into one continuous long-drawn sound. Two simultaneous exchanges with the left made a clap like a pistol-shot, and then as Harrison rushed in for a fall, Wilson slipped him, and over went my old friend upon his face, partly from the impetus of his own futile attack, and partly from a swinging half-arm blow which the west-countryman brought home upon his ear as he passed.

"Knock-down for Wilson," cried the referee, and the answering roar was like the broadside of a seventy-four. Up went hundreds of curly-brimmed Corinthian hats into the air, and the slope before us was a bank of flushed and yelling faces. My heart was cramped with my fears, and I winced at every blow, yet I was conscious also of an absolute fascination, with a wild thrill of fierce joy and a certain exultation in our common human nature which could rise above pain and fear in its straining after the very humblest form of fame.

Belcher and Baldwin had pounced upon their man, and had him up and in his corner in an instant, but, in spite of the coolness with which the hardy smith took his punishment, there was immense exultation amongst the west-countrymen.

"We've got him! He's beat! He's beat!" shouted the two Jew seconds. "It's a hundred to a tizzy on Gloucester!"

"Beat, is he?" answered Belcher. "You'll need to rent this field before you can beat him, for he'll stand a month of that kind of fly-flappin'." He was swinging a towel in front of Harrison as he spoke, whilst Baldwin mopped him with the sponge.

"How is it with you, Harrison?" asked my uncle.

"Hearty as a buck, sir. It's as right as the day."

The cheery answer came with so merry a ring that the clouds cleared from my uncle's face.

"You should recommend your man to lead more, Tregellis," said Sir John Lade. "He'll never win it unless he leads."

"He knows more about the game than you or I do, Lade. I'll let him take his own way."

"The betting is three to one against him now," said a gentleman, whose grizzled moustache showed that he was an officer of the late war.

"Very true, General Fitzpatrick. But you'll observe that it is the raw young bloods who are giving the odds, and the Sheenies who are taking them. I still stick to my opinion."

The two men came briskly up to the scratch at the call of time, the smith a little lumpy on one side of his head, but with the same good-humoured and yet menacing smile upon his lips. As to Wilson, he was exactly as he had begun in appearance, but twice I saw him close his lips sharply as if he were in a sudden spasm of pain, and the blotches over his ribs were darkening from scarlet to a sullen purple. He held his guard somewhat lower to screen this vulnerable point, and he danced round his opponent with a lightness which showed that his wind had not been impaired by the body-blows, whilst the smith still adopted the impassive tactics with which he had commenced.

Many rumours had come up to us from the west as to

Crab Wilson's fine science and the quickness of his hitting, but the truth surpassed what had been expected of him. In this round and the two which followed he showed a swiftness and accuracy which old ring-siders declared that Mendoza in his prime had never surpassed. He was in and out like lightning, and his blows were heard and felt rather than seen. But Harrison still took them all with the same dogged smile, occasionally getting in a hard body-blow in return, for his adversary's height and his position combined to keep his face out of danger. At the end of the fifth round the odds were four to one, and the west-countrymen were riotous in their exultation.

"What think you now?" cried the west-countryman behind me, and in his excitement he could get no further save to repeat over and over again, "What think you now?" When in the sixth round the smith was peppered twice without getting in a counter, and had the worst of the fall as well, the fellow became inarticulate altogether, and could only huzza wildly in his delight. Sir Lothian Hume was smiling and nodding his head, whilst my uncle was coldly impassive, though I was sure that his heart was as heavy as mine.

"This won't do, Tregellis," said General Fitzpatrick. "My money is on the old one, but the other is the finer boxer."

"My man is *un peu passé*, but he will come through all right," answered my uncle.

I saw that both Belcher and Baldwin were looking grave, and I knew that we must have a change of some sort, or the old tale of youth and age would be told once more.

The seventh round, however, showed the reserve strength of the hardy old fighter, and lengthened the faces of those layers of odds who had imagined that the fight was practically over, and that a few finishing rounds would have given the smith his *coup-de-grâce*. It was clear when the two men faced each other that Wilson had made himself up for mischief and meant to force the fighting

and maintain the lead which he had gained, but that grey gleam was not quenched yet in the veteran's eyes, and still the same smile played over his grim face. He had become more jaunty, too, in the swing of his shoulders and the poise of his head, and it brought my confidence back to see the brisk way in which he squared up to his man.

Wilson led with his left, but was short, and he only just avoided a dangerous right-hander which whistled in at his ribs. "Bravo, old 'un, one of those will be a dose of laudanum if you get it home," cried Belcher. There was a pause of shuffling feet and hard breathing, broken by the thud of a tremendous body-blow from Wilson, which the smith stopped with the utmost coolness. Then again a few seconds of silent tension, when Wilson led viciously at the head, but Harrison took it on his forearm, smiling and nodding at his opponent. "Get the pepper-box open!" yelled Mendoza, and Wilson sprang in to carry out his instructions, but was hit out again by a heavy drive on the chest. "Now's the time! Follow it up!" cried Belcher, and in rushed the smith, pelting in his half-arm blows, and taking the returns without a wince, until Crab Wilson went down exhausted in the corner. Both men had their marks to show, but Harrison had all the best of the rally, so it was our turn to throw our hats into the air and to shout ourselves hoarse, whilst the seconds clapped their man upon his broad back as they hurried him to his corner.

"What think you now?" shouted all the neighbours of the west-countryman, repeating his own refrain.

"Why, Dutch Sam never put in a better rally," cried Sir John Lade. "What's the betting now, Sir Lothian?"

"I have laid all that I intend; but I don't think my man can lose it." For all that, the smile had faded from his face, and I observed that he glanced continually over his shoulder into the crowd behind him.

A sullen purple cloud had been drifting slowly up from the south-west—though I dare say that out of

thirty thousand folk there were very few who had spared the time or attention to mark it. Now it suddenly made its presence apparent by a few heavy drops of rain, thickening rapidly into a sharp shower, which filled the air with its hiss, and rattled noisily upon the high, hard hats of the Corinthians. Coat-collars were turned up and handkerchiefs tied round necks, whilst the skins of the two men glistened with the moisture as they stood up to each other once more. I noticed that Belcher whispered very earnestly into Harrison's ear as he rose from his knee, and that the smith nodded his head curtly, with the air of a man who understands and approves of his orders.

And what those orders were was instantly apparent. Harrison was to be turned from the defender into the attacker. The result of the rally in the last round had convinced his seconds that when it came to give-and-take hitting, their hardy and powerful man was likely to have the better of it. And then on the top of this came the rain. With the slippery grass the superior activity of Wilson would be neutralised, and he would find it harder to avoid the rushes of his opponent. It was in taking advantage of such circumstances that the art of ringcraft lay, and many a shrewd and vigilant second had won a losing battle for his man. "Go in, then! Go in!" whooped the two prize-fighters, while every backer in the crowd took up the roar.

And Harrison went in, in such fashion that no man who saw him do it will ever forget it. Crab Wilson, as game as a pebble, met him with a flush hit every time, but no human strength or human science seemed capable of stopping the terrible onslaught of this iron man. Round after round he scrambled his way in, slap-bang, right and left, every hit tremendously sent home. Sometimes he covered his own face with his left, and sometimes he disdained to use any guard at all, but his springing hits were irresistible. The rain lashed down upon them, pouring from their faces and running in crimson trickles

over their bodies, but neither gave any heed to it save to manœuvre always with the view of bringing it into each other's eyes. But round after round the west-countryman fell, and round after round the betting rose, until the odds were higher in our favour than ever they had been against us. With a sinking heart, filled with pity and admiration for these two gallant men, I longed that every bout might be the last, and yet the " Time ! " was hardly out of Jackson's mouth before they had both sprung from their seconds' knees, with laughter upon their mutilated faces and chaffing words upon their bleeding lips. It may have been a humble object-lesson, but I give you my word that many a time in my life I have braced myself to a hard task by the remembrance of that morning upon Crawley Downs, asking myself if my manhood were so weak that I would not do for my country, or for those whom I loved, as much as these two would endure for a paltry stake and for their own credit amongst their fellows. Such a spectacle may brutalise those who are brutal, but I say that there is a spiritual side to it also, and that the sight of the utmost human limit of endurance and courage is one which bears a lesson of its own.

But if the Ring can breed bright virtues, it is but a partisan who can deny that it can be the mother of black vices also, and we were destined that morning to have a sight of each. It so chanced that, as the battle went against his man, my eyes stole round very often to note the expression upon Sir Lothian Hume's face, for I knew how fearlessly he had laid the odds, and I understood that his fortunes as well as his champion were going down before the smashing blows of the old bruiser. The confident smile with which he had watched the opening rounds had long vanished from his lips, and his cheeks had turned of a sallow pallor, whilst his small, fierce grey eyes looked furtively from under his craggy brows, and more than once he burst into savage imprecations when Wilson was beaten to the ground. But especially I noticed that his chin was always coming round to his

shoulder, and that at the end of every round he sent keen little glances flying backwards into the crowd. For some time, amidst the immense hill-side of faces which banked themselves up on the slope behind us, I was unable to pick out the exact point at which his gaze was directed. But at last I succeeded in following it. A very tall man, who showed a pair of broad, bottle-green shoulders high above his neighbours, was looking very hard in our direction, and I assured myself that a quick exchange of almost imperceptible signals was going on between him and the Corinthian baronet. I became conscious, also, as I watched this stranger, that the cluster of men around him were the roughest elements of the whole assembly : fierce, vicious-looking fellows, with cruel debauched faces, who howled like a pack of wolves at every blow, and yelled execrations at Harrison whenever he walked across to his corner. So turbulent were they that I saw the ringkeepers whisper together and glance up in their direction, as if preparing for trouble in store, but none of them had realised how near it was to breaking out, or how dangerous it might prove.

Thirty rounds had been fought in an hour and twenty-five minutes, and the rain was pelting down harder than ever. A thick steam rose from the two fighters, and the ring was a pool of mud. Repeated falls had turned the men brown, with a horrible mottling of crimson blotches. Round after round had ended by Crab Wilson going down, and it was evident, even to my inexperienced eyes, that he was weakening rapidly. He leaned heavily upon the two Jews when they led him to his corner, and he reeled when their support was withdrawn. Yet his science had, through long practice, become an automatic thing with him so that he stopped and hit with less power, but with as great accuracy as ever. Even now a casual observer might have thought that he had the best of the battle, for the smith was far the more terribly marked, but there was a wild stare in the west-countryman's eyes, and a strange catch in his breathing, which told us that it is

not the most dangerous blow which shows upon the surface. A heavy cross-buttock at the end of the thirty-first round shook the breath from his body, and he came up for the thirty-second with the same jaunty gallantry as ever, but with the dazed expression of a man whose wind has been utterly smashed.

"He's got the roly-polies," cried Belcher. "You have it your own way now!"

"I'll vight for a week yet," gasped Wilson.

"Damme, I like his style," cried Sir John Lade. "No shifting, nothing shy, no hugging nor hauling. It's a shame to let him fight. Take the brave fellow away!"

"Take him away! Take him away!" echoed a hundred voices.

"I won't be taken away! Who dares say so?" cried Wilson, who was back, after another fall, upon his second's knee.

"His heart won't suffer him to cry 'Enough,'" said General Fitzpatrick. "As his patron, Sir Lothian, you should direct the sponge to be thrown up."

"You think he can't win it?"

"He is hopelessly beat, sir."

"You don't know him. He's a glutton of the first water."

"A gamer man never pulled his shirt off; but the other is too strong for him."

"Well, sir, I believe that he can fight another ten rounds." He half turned as he spoke, and I saw him throw up his left arm with a singular gesture into the air.

"Cut the ropes! Fair play! Wait till the rain stops!" roared a stentorian voice behind me, and I saw that it came from the big man with the bottle-green coat. His cry was a signal, for, like a thunderclap, there came a hundred hoarse voices shouting together: "Fair play for Gloucester! Break the ring! Break the ring!"

Jackson had called "Time," and the two mud-plastered men were already upon their feet, but the interest had suddenly changed from the fight to the

audience. A succession of heaves from the back of the crowd had sent a series of long ripples running through it, all the heads swaying rhythmically in the one direction like a wheatfield in a squall. With every impulsion the oscillation increased, those in front trying vainly to steady themselves against the rushes from behind, until suddenly there came a sharp snap, two white stakes with earth clinging to their points flew into the outer ring, and a spray of people, dashed from the solid wave behind, were thrown against the line of the beaters-out. Down came the long horse-whips, swayed by the most vigorous arms in England; but the wincing and shouting victims had no sooner scrambled back a few yards from the merciless cuts, before a fresh charge from the rear hurled them once more into the arms of the prize-fighters. Many threw themselves down upon the turf and allowed successive waves to pass over their bodies, whilst others, driven wild by the blows, returned them with their hunting-crops and walking-canes. And then, as half the crowd strained to the left and half to the right to avoid the pressure from behind, the vast mass was suddenly reft in twain, and through the gap surged the rough fellows from behind, all armed with loaded sticks and yelling for "Fair play and Gloucester!" Their determined rush carried the prize-fighters before them, the inner ropes snapped like threads, and in an instant the ring was a swirling, seething mass of figures, whips and sticks falling and clattering, whilst, face to face, in the middle of it all, so wedged that they could neither advance nor retreat, the smith and the west-countryman continued their long-drawn battle as oblivious of the chaos raging round them as two bull-dogs would have been who had got each other by the throat. The driving rain, the cursing and screams of pain, the swish of the blows, the yelling of orders and advice, the heavy smell of the damp cloth—every incident of that scene of my early youth comes back to me now in my old age as clearly as if it had been but yesterday.

It was not easy for us to observe anything at the time,

however, for we were ourselves in the midst of the frantic crowd, swaying about and carried occasionally quite off our feet, but endeavouring to keep our places behind Jackson and Berkeley Craven, who, with sticks and whips meeting over their heads, were still calling the rounds and superintending the fight.

"The ring's broken!" shouted Sir Lothian Hume. "I appeal to the referee! The fight is null and void."

"You villain!" cried my uncle, hotly; "this is your doing."

"You have already an account to answer for with me," said Hume, with his sinister sneer, and as he spoke he was swept by the rush of the crowd into my uncle's very arms. The two men's faces were not more than a few inches apart, and Sir Lothian's bold eyes had to sink before the imperious scorn which gleamed coldly in those of my uncle.

"We will settle our accounts, never fear, though I degrade myself in meeting such a blackleg. What is it, Craven?"

"We shall have to declare a draw, Tregellis."

"My man has the fight in hand."

"I cannot help it. I cannot attend to my duties when every moment I am cut over with a whip or a stick."

Jackson suddenly made a wild dash into the crowd, but returned with empty hands and a rueful face.

"They've stolen my timekeeper's watch," he cried. "A little cove snatched it out of my hand."

My uncle clapped his hand to his fob.

"Mine has gone also!" he cried.

"Draw it at once, or your man will get hurt," said Jackson, and we saw that as the undaunted smith stood up to Wilson for another round, a dozen rough fellows were clustering round him with bludgeons.

"Do you consent to a draw, Sir Lothian Hume?"

"I do."

"And you, Sir Charles?"

"Certainly not."

"The ring is gone."

"That is no fault of mine."

"Well, I see no help for it. As referee I order that the men be withdrawn, and that the stakes be returned to their owners."

"A draw! A draw!" shrieked everyone, and the crowd in an instant dispersed in every direction, the pedestrians running to get a good lead upon the London road, and the Corinthians in search of their horses and carriages. Harrison ran over to Wilson's corner and shook him by the hand.

"I hope I have not hurt you much."

"I'm hard put to it to stand. How are you?"

"My head's singin' like a kettle. It was the rain that helped me."

"Yes, I thought I had you beat one time. I never wish a better battle."

"Nor me either. Good-bye."

And so those two brave-hearted fellows made their way amidst the yelping roughs, like two wounded lions amidst a pack of wolves and jackals. I say again that, if the Ring has fallen low, it is not in the main the fault of the men who have done the fighting, but it lies at the door of the vile crew of ring-side parasites and ruffians, who are as far below the honest pugilist as the welsher and the blackleg are below the noble racehorse which serves them as a pretext for their villainies.

19. *Cliffe Royal*

MY uncle was humanely anxious to get Harrison to bed as soon as possible, for the smith, although he laughed at his own injuries, had none the less been severely punished.

"Don't you dare ever to ask my leave to fight again, Jack Harrison," said his wife, as she looked ruefully at his battered face. "Why, it's worse than when you

beat Black Baruk ; and if it weren't for your topcoat, I couldn't swear you were the man who led me to the altar ! If the King of England ask you, I'll never let you do it more."

" Well, old lass, I give my davy that I never will. It's best that I leave fightin' before fightin' leaves me. He screwed up his face as he took a sup from Sir Charles's brandy flask. " It's fine liquor, sir, but it gets into my cut lips most cruel. Why, here's John Cummings, of the Friar's Oak Inn, as I'm a sinner, and seekin' for a mad doctor, to judge by the look of him ! "

It was certainly a most singular figure who was approaching us over the moor. With the flushed, dazed face of a man who is just recovering from recent intoxication, the landlord was tearing madly about, his hat gone, and his hair and beard flying in the wind. He ran in little zigzags from one knot of people to another, whilst his peculiar appearance drew a running fire of witticisms as he went, so that he reminded me irresistibly of a snipe skimming along through a line of guns. We saw him stop for an instant by the yellow barouche, and hand something to Sir Lothian Hume. Then on he came again, until at last, catching sight of us, he gave a cry of joy, and ran for us full speed with a note held out at arm's length.

" You're a nice cove, too, John Cummings," said Harrison, reproachfully. " Didn't I tell you not to let a drop pass your lips until you had given your message to Sir Charles ? "

" I ought to be pole-axed, I ought," he cried in bitter repentance. " I asked for you, Sir Charles, as I'm a livin' man, I did, but you weren't there, and what with bein' so pleased at gettin' such odds when I knew Harrison was goin' to fight, an' what with the landlord at the George wantin' me to try his own specials, I let my senses go clean away from me. And now it's only after the fight is over that I see you, Sir Charles, an' if you lay that whip over my back, it's only what I deserve."

But my uncle was paying no attention whatever to the voluble self-reproaches of the landlord. He had opened the note, and was reading it with a slight raising of the eyebrows, which was almost the very highest note in his limited emotional gamut.

"What make you of this, nephew?" he asked, handing it to me.

This was what I read—

"SIR CHARLES TREGELLIS,

"For God's sake, come at once, when this reaches you, to Cliffe Royal, and tarry as little as possible upon the way. You will see me there, and you will hear much which concerns you deeply. I pray you to come as soon as may be; and until then I remain him whom you knew as

"JAMES HARRISON."

"Well, nephew?" asked my uncle.

"Why, sir, I cannot tell what it may mean."

"Who gave it to you, sirrah?"

"It was young Jim Harrison himself, sir," said the landlord, "though indeed I scarce knew him at first, for he looked like his own ghost. He was so eager that it should reach you that he would not leave me until the horse was harnessed and I started upon my way. There was one note for you and one for Sir Lothian Hume, and I wish to God he had chosen a better messenger!"

"This is a mystery indeed," said my uncle, bending his brows over the note. "What should he be doing at that house of ill-omen? And why does he sign himself 'him whom you knew as Jim Harrison'? By what other style should I know him? Harrison, you can throw a light upon this. You, Mrs. Harrison; I see by your face that you understand it."

"Maybe we do, Sir Charles; but we are plain folk, my Jack and I, and we go as far as we see our way, and when we don't see our way any longer, we just stop.

We've been goin' this twenty year, but now we'll draw aside and let our betters get to the front ; so if you wish to find what that note means, I can only advise you to do what you are asked, and to drive over to Cliffe Royal, where you will find out."

My uncle put the note into his pocket.

" I don't move until I have seen you safely in the hands of the surgeon, Harrison."

" Never mind for me, sir. The missus and me can drive down to Crawley in the gig, and a yard of stickin' plaster and a raw steak will soon set me to rights."

But my uncle was by no means to be persuaded, and he drove the pair into Crawley, where the smith was left under the charge of his wife in the very best quarters which money could procure. Then, after a hasty luncheon, we turned the mares' heads for the south.

" This ends my connection with the Ring, nephew," said my uncle. " I perceive that there is no possible means by which it can be kept pure from roguery. I have been cheated and befooled ; but a man learns wisdom at last, and never again do I give countenance to a prize-fight."

Had I been older or he less formidable, I might have said what was in my heart, and begged him to give up other things also—to come out from those shallow circles in which he lived, and to find some work that was worthy of his strong brain and his good heart. But the thought had hardly formed itself in my mind before he had dropped his serious vein, and was chatting away about some new silver-mounted harness which he intended to spring upon the Mall, and about the match for a thousand guineas which he meant to make between his filly Ethelberta and Lord Doncaster's famous three-year-old Aurelius.

We had got as far as Whiteman's Green, which is rather more than midway between Crawley Down and Friar's Oak, when, looking backwards, I saw far down

the road the gleam of the sun upon a high yellow carriage. Sir Lothian Hume was following us.

"He has had the same summons as we, and is bound for the same destination," said my uncle, glancing over his shoulder at the distant barouche. "We are both wanted at Cliffe Royal—we, the two survivors of that black business. And it is Jim Harrison of all people who calls us there. Nephew, I have had an eventful life, but I feel as if the very strangest scene of it were waiting for me among those trees."

He whipped up the mares, and now from the curve of the road we could see the high dark pinnacles of the old Manor-house shooting up above the ancient oaks which ring it round. The sight of it, with its blood-stained and ghost-blasted reputation, would in itself have been enough to send a thrill through my nerves; but when the words of my uncle made me suddenly realise that this strange summons was indeed for the two men who were concerned in that old-world tragedy, and that it was the playmate of my youth who had sent it, I caught my breath as I seemed vaguely to catch a glimpse of some portentous thing forming itself in front of us. The rusted gates between the crumbling heraldic pillars were folded back, and my uncle flicked the mares impatiently as we flew up the weed-grown avenue, until he pulled them on their haunches before the time-blotched steps. The front door was open, and Boy Jim was waiting there to meet us.

But it was a different Boy Jim from him whom I had known and loved. There was a change in him somewhere, a change so marked that it was the first thing that I noticed, and yet so subtle that I could not put words to it. He was not better dressed than of old, for I well knew the old brown suit that he wore. He was not less comely, for his training had left him the very model of what a man should be. And yet there was a change, a touch of dignity in the expression, a suggestion of confidence in the bearing which seemed, now that it was

supplied, to be the one thing which had been needed to give him harmony and finish. Somehow, in spite of his prowess, his old school name of "Boy" had clung very naturally to him, until that instant when I saw him standing in his self-contained and magnificent manhood in the doorway of the ancient house. A woman stood beside him, her hand resting upon his shoulder, and I saw that it was Miss Hinton, of Anstey Cross.

"You remember me, Sir Charles Tregellis," said she, coming forward, as we sprang down from the curricle.

My uncle looked hard at her with a puzzled face.

"I do not think that I have the privilege, madame. And yet——"

"Polly Hinton, of the Haymarket. You surely cannot have forgotten Polly Hinton."

"Forgotten! Why, we have mourned for you in Fops' Alley for more years than I care to think of. But what in the name of wonder——"

"I was privately married, and I retired from the stage. I want you to forgive me for taking Jim away from you last night."

"It was you, then?"

"I had a stronger claim even than you could have. You were his patron; I was his mother." She drew his head down to hers as she spoke, and there, with their cheeks together, were the two faces, the one stamped with the waning beauty of womanhood, the other with the waxing strength of man, and yet so alike in the dark eyes, the blue-black hair and the broad white brow, that I marvelled that I had never read her secret on the first days that I had seen them together. "Yes," she cried, "he is my own boy, and he saved me from what is worse than death, as your nephew Rodney could tell you. Yet my lips were sealed, and it was only last night that I could tell him that it was his mother whom he had brought back by his gentleness and his patience into the sweetness of life."

"Hush, mother!" said Jim, turning his lips to her

cheek. "There are some things which are between ourselves. But tell me, Sir Charles, how went the fight?"

"Your uncle would have won it, but the roughs broke the ring."

"He is no uncle of mine, Sir Charles, but he has been the best and truest friend, both to me and to my father, that ever the world could offer. I only know one as true," he continued, taking me by the hand, "and dear old Rodney Stone is his name. But I trust he was not much hurt?"

"A week or two will set him right. But I cannot pretend to understand how this matter stands, and you must allow me to say that I have not heard you advance anything yet which seems to me to justify you in abandoning your engagements at a moment's notice."

"Come in, Sir Charles, and I am convinced that you will acknowledge that I could not have done otherwise. But here, if I mistake not, is Sir Lothian Hume."

The yellow barouche had swung into the avenue, and a few moments later the weary, panting horses had pulled up behind our curricle. Sir Lothian sprang out, looking as black as a thunder-cloud.

"Stay where you are, Corcoran," said he; and I caught a glimpse of a bottle-green coat which told me who was his travelling companion. "Well," he continued, looking round him with an insolent stare, "I should vastly like to know who has had the insolence to give me so pressing an invitation to visit my own house, and what in the devil you mean by daring to trespass upon my grounds?"

"I promise you that you will understand this and a good deal more before we part, Sir Lothian," said Jim, with a curious smile playing over his face. "If you will follow me, I will endeavour to make it all clear to you."

With his mother's hand in his own, he led us into that ill-omened room where the cards were still heaped upon

the side-board, and the dark shadow lurked in the corner of the ceiling.

"Now, sirrah, your explanation!" cried Sir Lothian, standing with his arms folded by the door.

"My first explanations I owe to you, Sir Charles," said Jim; and as I listened to his voice and noted his manner, I could not but admire the effect which the company of her whom he now knew to be his mother had had upon a rude country lad. "I wish to tell you what occurred last night."

"I will tell it for you, Jim," said his mother. "You must know, Sir Charles, that though my son knew nothing of his parents, we were both alive, and had never lost sight of him. For my part, I let him have his own way in going to London and in taking up this challenge. It was only yesterday that it came to the ears of his father, who would have none of it. He was in the weakest health, and his wishes were not to be gainsayed. He ordered me to go at once and to bring his son to his side. I was at my wit's end, for I was sure that Jim would never come unless a substitute were provided for him. I went to the kind, good couple who had brought him up, and I told them how matters stood. Mrs. Harrison loved Jim as if he had been her own son, and her husband loved mine, so they came to my help, and may God bless them for their kindness to a distracted wife and mother! Harrison would take Jim's place if Jim would go to his father. Then I drove to Crawley. I found out which was Jim's room, and I spoke to him through the window, for I was sure that those who had backed him would not let him go. I told him that I was his mother. I told him who was his father. I said that I had my phaeton ready, and that he might, for all I knew, be only in time to receive the dying blessing of that parent whom he had never known. Still the boy would not go until he had my assurance that Harrison would take his place."

"Why did he not leave a message with Belcher?"

"My head was in a whirl, Sir Charles. To find a

father and a mother, a new name and a new rank in a few minutes might turn a stronger brain than ever mine was. My mother begged me to come with her, and I went. The phaeton was waiting, but we had scarcely started when some fellow seized the horse's head, and a couple of ruffians attacked us. One of them I beat over the head with the butt of the whip, so that he dropped the cudgel with which he was about to strike me; then lashing the horse, I shook off the others and got safely away. I cannot imagine who they were or why they should molest me."

"Perhaps Sir Lothian Hume could tell you," said my uncle.

Our enemy said nothing; but his little grey eyes slid round with a most murderous glance in our direction.

"After I had come here and seen my father I went down——"

My uncle stopped him with a cry of astonishment.

"What did you say, young man? You came *here* and you saw your father—here at Cliffe Royal?"

"Yes, sir."

My uncle had turned very pale.

"In God's name, then, tell us who your father is!"

Jim made no answer save to point over our shoulders, and glancing round, we became aware that two people had entered the room through the door which led to the bedroom stair. The one I recognised in an instant. That impassive, mask-like face and demure manner could only belong to Ambrose, the former valet of my uncle. The other was a very different and even more singular figure. He was a tall man, clad in a dark dressing-gown, and leaning heavily upon a stick. His long, bloodless countenance was so thin and so white that it gave the strangest illusion of transparency. Only within the folds of a shroud have I ever seen so wan a face. The brindled hair and the rounded back gave the impression of advanced age, and it was only the dark brows and the bright alert eyes glancing out from beneath them which

made me doubt whether it was really an old man who stood before us.

There was an instant of silence, broken by a deep oath from Sir Lothian Hume.

"Lord Avon, by God!" he cried.

"Very much at your service, gentlemen," answered the strange figure in the dressing-gown.

20. *Lord Avon*

MY uncle was an impassive man by nature, and had become more so by the tradition of the society in which he lived. He could have turned a card upon which his fortune depended without the twitch of a muscle, and I had seen him myself driving to imminent death on the Godstone Road with as calm a face as if he were out for his daily airing in the Mall. But now the shock which had come upon him was so great that he could only stand with white cheeks and staring, incredulous eyes. Twice I saw him open his lips, and twice he put his hand up to his throat, as though a barrier had risen betwixt himself and his utterance. Finally, he took a sudden little run forward with both his hands thrown out in greeting.

"Ned!" he cried.

But the strange man who stood before him folded his arms over his breast.

"No, Charles," said he.

My uncle stopped and looked at him in amazement.

"Surely, Ned, you have a greeting for me after all these years?"

"You believed me to have done this deed, Charles. I read it in your eyes and in your manner on that terrible morning. You never asked me for an explanation. You never considered how impossible such a crime must be for a man of my character. At the first breath of suspicion you, my intimate friend, the man who knew me best, set me down as a thief and a murderer."

"No, no, Ned."

"You did, Charles; I read it in your eyes. And so it was that when I wished to leave that which was most precious to me in safe hands I had to pass you over and to place him in the charge of the one man who from the first never doubted my innocence. Better a thousand times that my son should be brought up in a humble station and in ignorance of his unfortunate father, than that he should learn to share the doubts and suspicions of his equals."

"Then he is really your son!" cried my uncle, staring at Jim in amazement.

For answer the man stretched out his long withered arm, and placed a gaunt hand upon the shoulder of the actress, whilst she looked up at him with love in her eyes.

"I married, Charles, and I kept it secret from my friends, for I had chosen my wife outside our own circles. You know the foolish pride which has always been the strongest part of my nature. I could not bear to avow that which I had done. It was this neglect upon my part which led to an estrangement between us, and drove her into habits for which it is I who am to blame and not she. Yet on account of these same habits I took the child from her and gave her an allowance on condition that she did not interfere with it. I had feared that the boy might receive evil from her, and had never dreamed in my blindness that she might get good from him. But I have learned in my miserable life, Charles, that there is a power which fashions things for us, though we may strive to thwart it, and that we are in truth driven by an unseen current towards a certain goal, however much we may deceive ourselves into thinking that it is our own sails and oars which are speeding us upon our way."

My eyes had been upon the face of my uncle as he listened, but now as I turned them from him they fell once more upon the thin, wolfish face of Sir Lothian Hume. He stood near the window, his grey silhouette thrown up against the square of dusty glass; and I have

never seen such a play of evil passions, of anger, of jealousy, of disappointed greed upon a human face before.

"Am I to understand," said he, in a loud, harsh voice, "that this young man claims to be the heir of the peerage of Avon?"

"He is my lawful son."

"I knew you fairly well, sir, in our youth; but you will allow me to observe that neither I nor any friend of yours ever heard of a wife or a son. I defy Sir Charles Tregellis to say that he ever dreamed that there was any heir except myself."

"I have already explained, Sir Lothian, why I kept my marriage secret."

"You have explained, sir; but it is for others in another place to say if that explanation is satisfactory."

Two blazing dark eyes flashed out of the pale haggard face with as strange and sudden an effect as if a stream of light were to beat through the windows of a shattered and ruined house.

"You dare to doubt my word?"

"I demand a proof."

"My word is proof to those who know me."

"Excuse me, Lord Avon; but I know you, and I see no reason why I should accept your statement."

It was a brutal speech, and brutally delivered. Lord Avon staggered forward, and it was only his son on one side and his wife on the other who kept his quivering hands from the throat of his insulter. Sir Lothian recoiled from the pale fierce face with the black brows, but he still glared angrily about the room.

"A very pretty conspiracy this," he cried, "with a criminal, an actress and a prize-fighter all playing their parts. Sir Charles Tregellis, you shall hear from me again! And you also, my lord!" He turned upon his heel and strode from the room.

"He has gone to denounce me," said Lord Avon, a spasm of wounded pride distorting his features.

"Shall I bring him back?" cried Boy Jim.

" No, no, let him go. It is as well, for I have already made up my mind that my duty to you, my son, outweighs that which I owe, and have at such bitter cost fulfilled, to my brother and my family."

" You did me an injustice, Ned," said my uncle, " if you thought that I had forgotten you, or that I had judged you unkindly. If ever I have thought that you had done this deed—and how could I doubt the evidence of my own eyes—I have always believed that it was at a time when your mind was unhinged, and when you knew no more of what you were about than the man who is walking in his sleep."

" What do you mean when you talk about the evidence of your own eyes ? " asked Lord Avon, looking hard at my uncle.

" I saw you, Ned, upon that accursed night."

" Saw me ? Where ? "

" In the passage."

" And doing what ? "

" You were coming from your brother's room. I had heard his voice raised in anger and pain only an instant before. You carried in your hand a bag full of money, and your face betrayed the utmost agitation. If you can but explain to me, Ned, how you came to be there, you will take from my heart a weight which has pressed upon it for all these years."

No one now would have recognised in my uncle the man who was the leader of all the fops of London. In the presence of this old friend and of the tragedy which girt him round, the veil of triviality and affectation had been rent, and I felt all my gratitude towards him deepening for the first time into affection whilst I watched his pale, anxious face, and the eager hope which shone on his eyes as he awaited his friend's explanation. Lord Avon sank his face in his hands and for a few moments there was silence in the dim grey room.

" I do not wonder now that you were shaken," said he at last. " My God, what a net was cast round me !

Had this vile charge been brought against me, you, my dearest friend, would have been compelled to tear away the last doubt as to my guilt. And yet, in spite of what you have seen, Charles, I am as innocent in the matter as you are."

"I thank God that I hear you say so."

"But you are not satisfied, Charles. I can read it on your face. You wish to know why an innocent man should conceal himself for all these years."

"Your word is enough for me, Ned; but the world will wish this other question answered also."

"It was to save the family honour, Charles. You know how dear it was to me. I could not clear myself without proving my brother to have been guilty of the foulest crime which a gentleman could commit. For eighteen years I have screened him at the expense of everything which a man could sacrifice. I have lived a living death which has left me an old and shattered man when I am but in my fortieth year. But now when I am faced with the alternative of telling the facts about my brother, or of wronging my son, I can only act in one fashion, and the more so since I have reason to hope that a way may be found by which what I am now about to disclose to you need never come to the public ear."

He rose from his chair, and leaning heavily upon his two supporters, he tottered across the room to the dust-covered sideboard. There, in the centre of it, was lying that ill-boding pile of time-stained, mildewed cards, just as Boy Jim and I had seen them years before. Lord Avon turned them over with trembling fingers, and then picking up half a dozen, he brought them to my uncle.

"Place your finger and thumb upon the left-hand bottom corner of this card, Charles," said he. "Pass them lightly backwards and forwards, and tell me what you feel."

"It has been pricked with a pin."

"Precisely. What is the card?"

My uncle turned it over.

"It is the king of clubs."
"Try the bottom corner of this one."
"It is quite smooth."
"And the card is?"
"The three of spades."
"And this one?"
"It has been pricked. It is the ace of hearts."

Lord Avon hurled them down upon the floor.

"There you have the whole accursed story!" he cried. "Need I go further where every word is an agony?"

"I see something, but not all. You must continue, Ned."

The frail figure stiffened itself, as though he were visibly bracing himself for an effort.

"I will tell it you, then, once and for ever. Never again, I trust, will it be necessary for me to open my lips about the miserable business. You remember our game. You remember how we lost. You remember how you all retired, and left me sitting in this very room, and at that very table. Far from being tired, I was exceedingly wakeful, and I remained here for an hour or more thinking over the incidents of the game and the changes which it promised to bring about in my fortunes. I had, as you will recollect, lost heavily, and my only consolation was that my own brother had won. I knew that, owing to his reckless mode of life, he was firmly in the clutches of the Jews, and I hoped that that which had shaken my position might have the effect of restoring his. As I sat there, fingering the cards in an abstracted way, some chance led me to observe the small needle-pricks which you have just felt. I went over the packs, and found, to my unspeakable horror, that anyone who was in the secret could hold them in dealing in such a way as to be able to count the exact number of high cards which fell to each of his opponents. And then, with such a flush of shame and disgust as I had never known, I remember how my attention had been drawn to my brother's mode

of dealing, its slowness, and the way in which he held each card by the lower corner.

"I did not condemn him precipitately. I sat for a long time calling to mind every incident which could tell one way or the other. Alas! it all went to confirm me in my first horrible suspicion, and to turn it into a certainty. My brother had ordered the packs from Ledbury's, in Bond Street. They had been for some hours in his chambers. He had played throughout with a decision which had surprised us at the time. Above all, I could not conceal from myself that his past life was not such as to make even so abominable a crime as this impossible to him. Tingling with anger and shame, I went straight up that stair, the cards in my hand, and I taxed him with this lowest and meanest of all the crimes to which a villain could descend.

"He had not retired to rest, and his ill-gotten gains were spread out upon the dressing-table. I hardly know what I said to him, but the facts were so deadly that he did not attempt to deny his guilt. You will remember, as the only mitigation of his crime, that he was not yet one and twenty years of age. My words overwhelmed him. He went on his knees to me, imploring me to spare him. I told him that out of consideration for our family I should make no public exposure of him, but that he must never again in his life lay his hand upon a card, and that the money which he had won must be returned next morning with an explanation. It would be social ruin, he protested. I answered that he must take the consequence of his own deed. Then and there I burned the papers which he had won from me and I replaced in a canvas bag which lay upon the table all the gold pieces. I would have left the room without another word, but he clung to me, and tore the ruffle from my wrist in his attempt to hold me back, and to prevail upon me to promise to say nothing to you or Sir Lothian Hume. It was his despairing cry, when he found that I was proof against all his entreaties, which reached your ears,

Charles, and caused you to open your chamber door and to see me as I returned to my room."

My uncle drew a long sigh of relief.

"Nothing could be clearer!" he murmured.

"In the morning I came, as you remember, to your room, and I returned your money. I did the same to Sir Lothian Hume. I said nothing of my reasons for doing so, for I found that I could not bring myself to confess our disgrace to you. Then came the horrible discovery which has darkened my life, and which was as great a mystery to me as it has been to you. I saw that I was suspected, and I saw, also, that even if I were to clear myself, it could only be done by a public confession of the infamy of my brother. I shrank from it, Charles. Any personal suffering seemed to me to be better than to bring public shame upon a family which has held an untarnished record through so many centuries. I fled from my trial, therefore, and disappeared from the world.

"But, first of all, it was necessary that I should make arrangements for the wife and the son, of whose existence you and my other friends were ignorant. It is with shame, Mary, that I confess it, and I acknowledge to you that the blame of all the consequences rests with me rather than with you. At the time there were reasons, now happily long gone past, which made me determine that the son was better apart from the mother, whose absence at that age he would not miss. I would have taken you into my confidence, Charles, had it not been that your suspicions had wounded me deeply—for I did not at that time understand how strong the reasons were which had prejudiced you against me.

"On the evening after the tragedy I fled to London, and arranged that my wife should have a fitting allowance on condition that she did not interfere with the child. I had, as you remember, had much to do with Harrison, the prize-fighter, and I had often had occasion to admire his simple and honest nature. I took my boy to him now, and I found him, as I expected, incredulous as to

my guilt, and ready to assist me in any way. At his wife's entreaty he had just retired from the Ring, and was uncertain how he should employ himself. I was able to fit him up as a smith, on condition that he should ply his trade at the village of Friar's Oak. My agreement was that James was to be brought up as their nephew, and that he should know nothing of his unhappy parents.

"You will ask me why I selected Friar's Oak. It was because I had already chosen my place of concealment; and if I could not see my boy, it was, at least, some consolation to know that he was near me. You are aware that this mansion is one of the oldest in England; but you are not aware that it has been built with a very special eye to concealment, that there are no less than two habitable secret chambers, and that the outer or thicker walls are tunnelled into passages. The existence of these rooms has always been a family secret, though it was one which I valued so little that it was only the chance of my seldom using the house which had prevented me from pointing them out to some friend. Now I found that a secure retreat was provided for me in my extremity. I stole down to my own mansion, entered it at night, and leaving all that was dear to me behind, I crept like a rat behind the wainscot, to live out the remainder of my weary life in solitude and misery. In this worn face, Charles, and in this grizzled hair, you may read the diary of my most miserable existence.

"Once a week Harrison used to bring me up provisions, passing them through the pantry window, which I left open for the purpose. Sometimes I would steal out at night and walk under the stars once more, with the cool breeze upon my forehead; but this I had at last to stop, for I was seen by the rustics, and rumours of a spirit at Cliffe Royal began to get about. One night two ghost-hunters——"

"It was I, father," cried Boy Jim; "I and my friend, Rodney Stone."

"I know it was. Harrison told me so the same night.

I was proud, James, to see that you had the spirit of the Barringtons, and that I had an heir whose gallantry might redeem the family blot which I have striven so hard to cover over. Then came the day when your mother's kindness—her mistaken kindness—gave you the means of escaping to London."

"Ah, Edward," cried his wife, "if you had seen our boy, like a caged eagle, beating against the bars, you would have helped to give him even so short a flight as this."

"I do not blame you, Mary. It is possible that I should have done so. He went to London, and he tried to open a career for himself by his own strength and courage. How many of our ancestors have done the same, save only that a sword-hilt lay in their closed hands; but of them all I do not know that any have carried themselves more gallantly!"

"That I dare swear," said my uncle, heartily.

"And then, when Harrison at last returned, I learned that my son was actually matched to fight in a public prize-battle. That would not do, Charles! It was one thing to fight as you and I have fought in our youth, and it was another to compete for a purse of gold."

"My dear friend, I would not for the world——"

"Of course you would not, Charles. You chose the best man, and how could you do otherwise? But it would not do! I determined that the time had come when I should reveal myself to my son, the more so as there were many signs that my most unnatural existence had seriously weakened my health. Chance, or shall I not rather say Providence, had at last made clear all that had been dark, and given me the means of establishing my innocence. My wife went yesterday to bring my boy at last to the side of his unfortunate father."

There was silence for some time, and then it was my uncle's voice which broke it.

"You've been the most ill-used man in the world, Ned," said he. "Please God we shall have many years

yet in which to make up to you for it. But, after all, it seems to me that we are as far as ever from learning how your unfortunate brother met his death."

"For eighteen years it was as much a mystery to me as to you, Charles. But now at last the guilt is manifest. Stand forward, Ambrose, and tell your story as frankly and as fully as you have told it to me."

21. *The Valet's Story*

THE valet had shrunk into the dark corner of the room, and had remained so motionless that we had forgotten his presence until, upon this appeal from his former master, he took a step forward into the light, turning his sallow face in our direction. His usually impassive features were in a state of painful agitation, and he spoke slowly and with hesitation, as though his trembling lips could hardly frame the words. And yet so strong is habit that, even in this extremity of emotion, he assumed the deferential air of the high-class valet, and his sentences formed themselves in the sonorous fashion which had struck my attention upon that first day when the curricle of my uncle had stopped outside my father's door.

"My Lady Avon and gentlemen," said he, "if I have sinned in this matter, and I freely confess that I have done so, I only know one way in which I can atone for it, and that is by making the full and complete confession which my noble master, Lord Avon, has demanded. I assure you, then, that what I am about to tell you, surprising as it may seem, is the absolute and undeniable truth concerning the mysterious death of Captain Barrington.

"It may seem impossible to you that one in my humble walk of life should bear a deadly and implacable hatred against a man in the position of Captain Barrington. You think that the gulf between us is too wide. I can

tell you, gentlemen, that the gulf which can be bridged by unlawful love can be spanned also by an unlawful hatred, and that upon the day when this young man stole from me all that made my life worth living, I vowed to Heaven that I should take from him that foul life of his, though the deed would cover but the tiniest fraction of the debt which he owed me. I see that you look askance at me, Sir Charles Tregellis, but you should pray to God, sir, that you may never have the chance of finding out what you would yourself be capable of in the same position."

It was a wonder to all of us to see this man's fiery nature breaking suddenly through the artificial constraints with which he held it in check. His short dark hair seemed to bristle upwards, his eyes glowed with the intensity of his passion, and his face expressed a malignity of hatred which neither the death of his enemy nor the lapse of years could mitigate. The demure servant was gone, and there stood in his place a deep and dangerous man, one who might be an ardent lover or a most vindictive foe.

"We were about to be married, she and I, when some black chance threw him across our path. I do not know by what base deceptions he lured her away from me. I have heard that she was only one of many, and that he was an adept at the art. It was done before ever I knew the danger, and she was left with her broken heart and her ruined life to return to that home into which she had brought disgrace and misery. I only saw her once. She told me that her seducer had burst out a-laughing when she had reproached him for his perfidy and I swore to her that his heart's blood should pay me for that laugh.

"I was a valet at the time, but I was not yet in the service of Lord Avon. I applied for and gained that position with the one idea that it might give me an opportunity of settling my accounts with his younger brother. And yet my chance was a terribly long time coming, for many months had passed before the visit to

Cliffe Royal gave me the opportunity which I longed for by day and dreamed of by night. When it did come, however, it came in a fashion which was more favourable to my plans than anything that I had ever ventured to hope for.

"Lord Avon was of opinion that no one but himself knew of the secret passages in Cliffe Royal. In this he was mistaken. I knew of them—or, at least, I knew enough of them to serve my purpose. I need not tell you how, one day, when preparing the chambers for the guests, an accidental pressure upon part of the fittings caused a panel to gape in the woodwork, and showed me a narrow opening in the wall. Making my way down this, I found that another panel led into a larger bedroom beyond. That was all I knew, but it was all that was needed for my purpose. The disposal of the rooms had been left in my hands, and I arranged that Captain Barrington should sleep in the larger and I in the smaller. I could come upon him when I wished, and no one would be the wiser.

"And then he arrived. How can I describe to you the fever of impatience in which I lived until the moment should come for which I had waited and planned. For a night and a day they gambled, and for a night and a day I counted the minutes which brought me nearer to my man. They might ring for fresh wine at what hour they liked, they always found me waiting and ready, so that this young captain hiccoughed out that I was the model of all valets. My master advised me to go to bed. He had noticed my flushed cheek and my bright eyes, and he set me down as being in a fever. So I was, but it was a fever which only one medicine could assuage.

"Then at last, very early in the morning, I heard them push back their chairs, and I knew that their game had at last come to an end. When I entered the room to receive my orders, I found that Captain Barrington had already stumbled off to bed. The others had also retired, and my master was sitting alone at the table, with his

empty bottle and the scattered cards in front of him. He ordered me angrily to my room, and this time I obeyed him.

" My first care was to provide myself with a weapon. I knew that if I were face to face with him I could tear his throat out, but I must so arrange that the fashion of his death should be a noiseless one. There was a hunting trophy in the hall, and from it I took a straight heavy knife which I sharpened upon my boot. Then I stole to my room, and sat waiting upon the side of my bed. I had made up my mind what I should do. There would be little satisfaction in killing him if he was not to know whose hand had struck the blow, or which of his sins it came to avenge. Could I but bind him and gag him in his drunken sleep, then a prick or two of my dagger would arouse him to listen to what I had to say to him. I pictured the look in his eyes as the haze of sleep cleared slowly away from them, the look of anger turning suddenly to stark horror as he understood who I was and what I had come for. It would be the supreme moment of my life.

" I waited as it seemed to me for at least an hour ; but I had no watch, and my impatience was such that I dare say it really was little more than a quarter of that time. Then I rose, removed my shoes, took my knife, and having opened the panel, slipped silently through. It was not more than thirty feet that I had to go, but I went inch by inch, for the old rotten boards snapped like breaking twigs if a sudden weight was placed upon them. It was, of course, pitch dark, and very, very slowly I felt my way along. At last I saw a yellow seam of light glimmering in front of me, and I knew that it came from the other panel. I was too soon, then, since he had not extinguished his candles. I had waited many months, and I could afford to wait another hour, for I did not wish to do anything precipitately or in a hurry.

" It was very necessary to move silently now, since I was within a few feet of my man, with only the thin

wooden partition between. Age had warped and cracked the boards, so that when I had at last very stealthily crept my way as far as the sliding panel, I found that I could, without any difficulty, see into the room. Captain Barrington was standing by the dressing-table with his coat and vest off. A large pile of sovereigns and several slips of paper were lying before him, and he was counting over his gambling gains. His face was flushed, and he was heavy from want of sleep and from wine. It rejoiced me to see it, for it meant that his slumber would be deep, and that all would be made easy for me.

"I was still watching him, when of a sudden I saw him start, and a terrible expression come upon his face. For an instant my heart stood still, for I feared that he had in some way divined my presence. And then I heard the voice of my master within. I could not see the door by which he had entered, nor could I see him where he stood, but I heard all that he had to say. As I watched the captain's face flush fiery red, and then turn to a livid white as he listened to those bitter words which told him of his infamy, my revenge was sweeter—far sweeter—than my most pleasant dreams had ever pictured it. I saw my master approach the dressing-table, hold the papers in the flame of the candle, throw their charred ashes into the grate, and sweep the golden pieces into a small brown canvas bag. Then, as he turned to leave the room, the captain seized him by the wrist, imploring him, by the memory of their mother, to have mercy upon him; and I loved my master as I saw him drag his sleeve from the grasp of the clutching fingers, and leave the stricken wretch grovelling upon the floor.

"And now I was left with a difficult point to settle, for it was hard for me to say whether it was better that I should do that which I had come for, or whether, by holding this man's guilty secret, I might not have in my hand a keener and more deadly weapon than my master's hunting-knife. I was sure that Lord Avon could not and would not expose him. I knew your sense of family

pride too well, my lord, and I was certain that his secret was safe in your hands. But I both could and would; and then, when his life had been blasted, and he had been hounded from his regiment and from his clubs, it would be time, perhaps, for me to deal in some other way with him."

"Ambrose, you are a black villain," said my uncle.

"We all have our own feelings, Sir Charles; and you will permit me to say that a serving-man may resent an injury as much as a gentleman, though the redress of the duel is denied to him. But I am telling you frankly, at Lord Avon's request, all that I thought and did upon that night, and I shall continue to do so, even if I am not fortunate enough to win your approval.

"When Lord Avon had left him, the captain remained for some time in a kneeling attitude, with his face sunk upon a chair. Then he rose, and paced slowly up and down the room, his chin sunk upon his breast. Every now and then he would pluck at his hair, or shake his clenched hands in the air; and I saw the moisture glisten upon his brow. For a time I lost sight of him, and I heard him opening drawer after drawer, as though he were in search of something. Then he stood over by his dressing-table again, with his back turned to me. His head was thrown a little back, and he had both hands up to the collar of his shirt, as though he were striving to undo it. And then there was a gush as if a ewer had been upset, and down he sank upon the ground, with his head in the corner, twisted round at so strange an angle to his shoulders that one glimpse of it told me that my man was slipping swiftly from the clutch in which I had fancied that I held him. I slid my panel, and was in the room in an instant. His eyelids still quivered, and it seemed to me, as my gaze met his glazing eyes, that I could read both recognition and surprise in them. I laid my knife upon the floor, and I stretched myself out beside him, that I might whisper in his ear one or two little things of which I wished to remind him; but even as I did so, he gave a gasp and was gone.

" It is singular that I, who had never feared him in life, should be frightened at him now, and yet when I looked at him, and saw that all was motionless save the creeping stain upon the carpet, I was seized with a sudden foolish spasm of terror, and, catching up my knife, I fled swiftly and silently back to my own room, closing the panels behind me. It was only when I had reached it that I found that in my mad haste I had carried away, not the hunting-knife which I had taken with me, but the bloody razor which had dropped from the dead man's hand. This I concealed where no one has ever discovered it; but my fears would not allow me to go back for the other, as I might perhaps have done, had I foreseen how terribly its presence might tell against my master. And that, Lady Avon and gentlemen, is an exact and honest account of how Captain Barrington came by his end."

" And how was it," asked my uncle, angrily, " that you have allowed an innocent man to be persecuted all these years, when a word from you might have saved him ? "

" Because I had every reason to believe, Sir Charles, that that would be most unwelcome to Lord Avon. How could I tell all this without revealing the family scandal which he was so anxious to conceal ? I confess that at the beginning I did not tell him what I had seen, and my excuse must be that he disappeared before I had time to determine what I should do. For many a year, however —ever since I have been in your service, Sir Charles— my conscience tormented me, and I swore that if ever I should find my old master, I should reveal everything to him. The chance of my overhearing a story told by young Mr. Stone here, which showed me that someone was using the secret chambers of Cliffe Royal, convinced me that Lord Avon was in hiding there, and I lost no time in seeking him out and offering to do him all the justice in my power."

" What he says is true," said his master; " but it would have been strange indeed if I had hesitated to

sacrifice a frail life and failing health in a cause for which I freely surrendered all that youth had to offer. But new considerations have at last compelled me to alter my resolution. My son, through ignorance of his true position, was drifting into a course of life which accorded with his strength and his spirit, but not with the traditions of his house. Again, I reflected that many of those who knew my brother had passed away, that all the facts need not come out, and that my death whilst under the suspicion of such a crime would cast a deeper stain upon our name than the sin which he had so terribly expiated. For these reasons——"

The tramp of several heavy footsteps reverberating through the old house broke in suddenly upon Lord Avon's words. His wan face turned even a shade greyer as he heard it, and he looked piteously to his wife and son.

"They will arrest me!" he cried. "I must submit to the degradation of an arrest."

"This way, Sir James; this way," said the harsh tones of Sir Lothian Hume from without.

"I do not need to be shown the way in a house where I have drunk many a bottle of good claret," cried a deep voice in reply; and there in the doorway stood the broad figure of Squire Ovington in his buck-skins and top-boots, a riding-crop in his hand. Sir Lothian Hume was at his elbow, and I saw the faces of two country constables peeping over his shoulders.

"Lord Avon," said the squire, "as a magistrate of the county of Sussex, it is my duty to tell you that a warrant is held against you for the wilful murder of your brother, Captain Barrington, in the year 1786."

"I am ready to answer the charge."

"This I tell you as a magistrate. But as a man, and the Squire of Rougham Grange, I'm right glad to see you, Ned, and here's my hand on it, and never will I believe that a good Tory like yourself, and a man who could show his horse's tail to any field in the whole Down county, would ever be capable of so vile an act."

"You do me justice, James," said Lord Avon, clasping the broad, brown hand which the country squire had held out to him. "I am as innocent as you are; and I can prove it."

"Damned glad I am to hear it, Ned! That is to say, Lord Avon, that any defence which you may have to make will be decided upon by your peers and by the laws of your country."

"Until which time," added Sir Lothian Hume, "a stout door and a good lock will be the best guarantee that Lord Avon will be there when called for."

The squire's weather-stained face flushed to a deeper red as he turned upon the Londoner.

"Are you the magistrate of a county, sir?"

"I have not the honour, Sir James."

"Then how dare you advise a man who has sat on the bench for nigh twenty years? When I am in doubt, sir, the law provides me with a clerk with whom I may confer, and I ask no other assistance."

"You take too high a tone in this matter, Sir James. I am not accustomed to be taken to task so sharply."

"Nor am I accustomed, sir, to be interfered with in my official duties. I speak as a magistrate, Sir Lothian, but I am always ready to sustain my opinions as a man."

Sir Lothian bowed.

"You will allow me to observe, sir, that I have personal interests of the highest importance involved in this matter. I have every reason to believe that there is a conspiracy afoot which will affect my position as heir to Lord Avon's titles and estates. I desire his safe custody in order that this matter may be cleared up, and I call upon you, as a magistrate, to execute your warrant."

"Plague take it, Ned!" cried the squire, "I would that my clerk Johnson were here, for I would deal as kindly by you as the law allows; and yet I am, as you hear, called upon to secure your person."

"Permit me to suggest, sir," said my uncle, "that

so long as he is under the personal supervision of the magistrate, he may be said to be under the care of the law, and that this condition will be fulfilled if he is under the roof of Rougham Grange."

"Nothing could be better," cried the squire, heartily. "You will stay with me, Ned, until this matter blows over. In other words, Lord Avon, I make myself responsible, as the representative of the law, that you are held in safe custody until your person may be required of me."

"Yours is a true heart, James."

"Tut, tut! it is the due process of the law. I trust, Sir Lothian Hume, that you find nothing to object to in it!"

Sir Lothian shrugged his shoulders, and looked blackly at the magistrate. Then he turned to my uncle.

"There is a small matter still open between us," said he. "Would you kindly give me the name of a friend? Mr. Corcoran, who is outside in my barouche, would act for me, and we might meet to-morrow morning."

"With pleasure," answered my uncle. "I dare say your father would act for me, nephew? Your friend may call upon Lieutenant Stone, of Friar's Oak, and the sooner the better."

And so this strange conference ended. As for me, I had sprung to the side of the old friend of my boyhood, and was trying to tell him my joy at his good fortune, and listening to his assurance that nothing that could ever befall him could weaken the love that he bore me. My uncle touched me on the shoulder, and we were about to leave, when Ambrose, whose bronze mask had been drawn down once more over his fiery passions, came demurely towards him.

"Beg your pardon, Sir Charles," said he; "but it shocks me very much to see your cravat."

"You are right, Ambrose," my uncle answered. "Lorimer does his best, but I have never been able to fill your place."

"I should be proud to serve you, sir; but you must acknowledge that Lord Avon has the prior claim. If he will release me——"

"You may go, Ambrose; you may go!" cried Lord Avon. "You are an excellent servant, but your presence has become painful to me."

"Thank you, Ned," said my uncle. "But you must not leave me so suddenly again, Ambrose."

"Permit me to explain the reason, sir. I had determined to give you notice when we reached Brighton; but as we drove from the village that day, I caught a glimpse of a lady passing in a phaeton between whom and Lord Avon I was well aware there was a close intimacy, although I was not certain that she was actually his wife. Her presence there confirmed me in my opinion that he was in hiding at Cliffe Royal, and I dropped from your curricle and followed her at once, in order to lay the matter before her, and explain how very necessary it was that Lord Avon should see me."

"Well, I forgive you for your desertion, Ambrose," said my uncle; "and," he added, "I should be vastly obliged to you if you would rearrange my tie."

22. *The End*

SIR JAMES OVINGTON'S carriage was waiting without, and in it the Avon family, so tragically separated and so strangely reunited, were borne away to the squire's hospitable home. When they had gone, my uncle mounted his curricle, and drove Ambrose and myself to the village.

"We had best see your father at once, nephew," said he. "Sir Lothian and his man started some time ago. I should be sorry if there should be any hitch in our meeting."

For my part, I was thinking of our opponent's deadly reputation as a duellist, and I suppose that my features

must have betrayed my feelings, for my uncle began to laugh.

"Why, nephew," said he, "you look as if you were walking behind my coffin. It is not my first affair, and I dare bet that it will not be my last. When I fight near town I usually fire a hundred or so in Manton's back shop, but I dare say I can find my way to his waist-coat. But I confess that I am somewhat *accablé*, by all that has befallen us. To think of my dear old fricnd being not only alive, but innocent as well! And that he should have such a strapping son and heir to carry on the race of Avon! This will be the last blow to Hume, for I know that the Jews have given him rope on the score of his expectations. And you, Ambrose, that you should break out in such a way!"

Of all the amazing things which had happened, this seemed to have impressed my uncle most, and he re-curred to it again and again. That a man whom he had come to regard as a machine for tying cravats and brewing chocolate should suddenly develop fiery human passions was indeed a prodigy. If his silver razor-heater had taken to evil ways he could not have been more astounded.

We were still a hundred yards from the cottage when I saw the tall, green-coated Mr. Corcoran striding down the garden path. My father was waiting for us at the door with an expression of subdued delight upon his face.

"Happy to serve you in any way, Sir Charles," said he. "We've arranged it for to-morrow at seven on Ditchling Common."

"I wish these things could be brought off a little later in the day," said my uncle. "One has either to rise at a perfectly absurd hour, or else to neglect one's toilet."

"They are stopping across the road at the Friar's Oak inn, and if you would wish it later——"

"No, no; I shall make the effort. Ambrose, you will bring up the *batterie de toilette* at five."

"I don't know whether you would care to use my barkers," said my father. "I've had 'em in fourteen

actions, and up to thirty yards you couldn't wish a better tool."

"Thank you, I have my duelling pistols under the seat. See that the triggers are oiled, Ambrose, for I love a light pull. Ah, sister Mary, I have brought your boy back to you, none the worse, I hope, for the dissipations of town."

I need not tell you how my dear mother wept over me and fondled me, for you who have mothers will know for yourselves, and you who have not will never understand how warm and snug the home nest can be. How I had chafed and longed for the wonders of town, and yet, now that I had seen more than my wildest dreams had ever deemed possible, my eyes had rested upon nothing which was so sweet and so restful as our own little sitting-room, with its terra-cotta-coloured walls, and those trifles which are so insignificant in themselves, and yet so rich in memories—the blow-fish from the Moluccas, the narwhal's horn from the Arctic, and the picture of the *Ça Ira*, with Lord Hotham in chase! How cheery, too, to see at one side of the shining grate my father with his pipe and his merry red face, and on the other my mother with her fingers ever turning and darting with her knitting-needles! As I looked at them I marvelled that I could ever have longed to leave them, or that I could bring myself to leave them again.

But leave them I must, and that speedily, as I learned amidst the boisterous congratulations of my father and the tears of my mother. He had himself been appointed to the *Cato*, 64, with post rank, whilst a note had come from Lord Nelson at Portsmouth to say that a vacancy was open for me if I should present myself at once.

"And your mother has your sea-chest all ready, my lad, and you can travel down with me to-morrow; for if you are to be one of Nelson's men, you must show him that you are worthy of it."

"All the Stones have been in the sea-service," said my mother, apologetically, to my uncle, "and it is a great

chance that he should enter under Lord Nelson's own patronage. But we can never forget your kindness, Charles, in showing our dear Rodney something of the world."

"On the contrary, sister Mary," said my uncle, graciously, "your son has been an excellent companion to me—so much so that I fear that I am open to the charge of having neglected my dear Fidelio. I trust that I bring him back somewhat more polished than I found him. It would be folly to call him *distingué*, but he is at least unobjectionable. Nature has denied him the highest gifts, and I find him adverse to employing the compensating advantages of art; but, at least, I have shown him something of life, and I have taught him a few lessons in finesse and deportment which may appear to be wasted upon him at present, but which, none the less, may come back to him in his more mature years. If his career in town has been a disappointment to me, the reason lies mainly in the fact that I am foolish enough to measure others by the standard which I have myself set. I am well disposed towards him, however, and I consider him eminently adapted for the profession which he is about to adopt."

He held out his sacred snuff-box to me as he spoke, as a solemn pledge of his goodwill, and, as I look back at him, there is no moment at which I see him more plainly than that with the old mischievous light dancing once more in his large intolerant eyes, one thumb in the armpit of his vest, and the little shining box held out upon his snow-white palm. He was a type and leader of a strange breed of men which has vanished away from England—the full-blooded, virile buck, exquisite in his dress, narrow in his thoughts, coarse in his amusements and eccentric in his habits. They walk across the bright stage of English history with their finicky step, their preposterous cravats, their high collars, their dangling seals, and they vanish into those dark wings from which there is no return. The world has outgrown them, and

there is no place now for their strange fashions, their practical jokes, and carefully cultivated eccentricities. And yet behind this outer veiling of folly, with which they so carefully draped themselves, they were often men of strong character and robust personality. The languid loungers of St. James's were also the yachtsmen of the Solent, the fine riders of the shires, and the hardy fighters in many a wayside battle and many a morning frolic. Wellington picked his best officers from amongst them. They condescended occasionally to poetry or oratory; and Byron, Charles James Fox, Sheridan and Castlereagh preserved some reputation amongst them, in spite of their publicity. I cannot think how the historian of the future can hope to understand them, when I, who knew one of them so well, and bore his blood in my veins, could never quite tell how much of him was real, and how much was due to the affectations which he had cultivated so long that they had ceased to deserve the name. Through the chinks of that armour of folly I have sometimes thought that I had caught a glimpse of a good and true man within, and it pleases me to hope that I was right.

It was destined that the exciting incidents of that day were even now not at an end. I had retired early to rest, but it was impossible for me to sleep, for my mind would turn to Boy Jim and to the extraordinary change in his position and prospects. I was still turning and tossing when I heard the sound of flying hoofs coming down the London Road, and immediately afterwards the grating of wheels as they pulled up in front of the inn. My window chanced to be open, for it was a fresh spring night, and I heard the creak of the inn door, and a voice asking whether Sir Lothian Hume was within. At the name I sprang from my bed, and I was in time to see three men, who had alighted from the carriage, file into the lighted hall. The two horses were left standing, with the glare of the open door falling upon their brown shoulders and patient heads.

Ten minutes may have passed, and then I heard the clatter of many steps, and a knot of men came clustering through the door.

"You need not employ violence," said a harsh clear voice. "On whose suit is it?"

"Several suits, sir. They 'eld over in the 'opes that you'd pull off the fight this mornin'. Total amounts is twelve thousand pound."

"Look here, my man, I have a very important appointment for seven o'clock to-morrow. I'll give you fifty pounds if you will leave me until then."

"Couldn't do it, sir, really. It's more than our places as sheriff's officers is worth."

In the yellow glare of the carriage-lamp I saw the baronet look up at our windows, and if hatred could have killed, his eyes would have been as deadly as his pistol.

"I can't mount the carriage unless you free my hands," said he.

"'Old 'ard, Bill, for 'e looks wicious. Let go o' one arm at a time! Ah, would you, then?"

"Corcoran! Corcoran!" screamed a voice, and I saw a plunge, a struggle and one frantic figure breaking its way from the rest. Then came a heavy blow, and down he fell in the middle of the moonlit road, flapping and jumping among the dust like a trout new landed.

"He's napped it this time! Get 'im by the wrists, Jim! Now, all together?"

He was hoisted up like a bag of flour, and fell with a brutal thud into the bottom of the carriage. The three men sprang in after him, a whip whistled in the darkness, and I had seen the last that I or anyone else, save some charitable visitor to a debtors' gaol, was ever again destined to see of Sir Lothian Hume, the once fashionable Corinthian.

Lord Avon lived for two years longer—long enough, with the help of Ambrose, to fully establish his innocence of the horrible crime, in the shadow of which he had lived

so long. What he could not clear away, however, was the effect of those years of morbid and unnatural life spent in the hidden chambers of the old house; and it was only the devotion of his wife and of his son which kept the thin and flickering flame of his life alight. She whom I had known as the play-actress of Anstey Cross became the dowager Lady Avon; whilst Boy Jim, as dear to me now as when we harried birds' nests and tickled trout together, is now Lord Avon, beloved by his tenantry, the finest sportsman and the most popular man from the north of the Weald to the Channel. He was married to the second daughter of Sir James Ovington; and as I have seen three of his grandchildren within the week, I fancy that if any of Sir Lothian's descendants have their eye upon the property, they are likely to be as disappointed as their ancestor was before them. The old house of Cliffe Royal has been pulled down, owing to the terrible family associations which hung round it, and a beautiful modern building sprang up in its place. The lodge which stood by the Brighton Road was so dainty with its trellis-work and its rose-bushes that I was not the only visitor who declared that I had rather be the owner of it than of the great house amongst the trees. There for many years in a happy and peaceful old age lived Jack Harrison and his wife, receiving back in the sunset of their lives the loving care which they had themselves bestowed. Never again did Champion Harrison throw his leg over the ropes of a twenty-four-foot ring; but the story of the great battle between the smith and the west-countryman is still familiar to old ring-goers, and nothing pleased him better than to re-fight it all, round by round, as he sat in the sunshine under his rose-girt porch. But if he heard the tap of his wife's stick approaching him, his talk would break off at once into the garden and its prospects, for she was still haunted by the fear that he would some day go back to the Ring, and she never missed the old man for an hour without being convinced that he had hobbled off to wrest the belt from the latest upstart

champion. It was at his own very earnest request that they inscribed "He fought the good fight" upon his tombstone, and though I cannot doubt that he had Black Baruk and Crab Wilson in his mind when he asked it, yet none who knew him would grudge its spiritual meaning as a summing up of his clean and manly life.

Sir Charles Tregellis continued for some years to show his scarlet and gold at Newmarket, and his inimitable coats in St. James's. It was he who invented buttons and loops at the ends of dress pantaloons, and who broke fresh ground by his investigation of the comparative merits of isinglass and of starch in the preparation of shirt-fronts. There are old fops still lurking in the corners of Arthur's or of White's who can remember Tregellis's dictum, that a cravat should be so stiffened that three parts of the length could be raised by one corner, and the painful schism which followed when Lord Alvanley and his school contended that a half was sufficient. Then came the supremacy of Brummell, and the open breach upon the subject of velvet collars, in which the town followed the lead of the younger man. My uncle, who was not born to be second to anyone, retired instantly to St. Albans, and announced that he would make it the centre of fashion and of society, instead of degenerate London. It chanced, however, that the mayor and corporation waited upon him with an address of thanks for his good intentions towards the town, and that the burgesses, having ordered new coats from London for the occasion, were all arrayed in velvet collars, which so preyed upon my uncle's spirits that he took to his bed, and never showed his face in public again. His money, which had ruined what might have been a great life, was divided amongst many bequests, an annuity to his valet, Ambrose, being amongst them; but enough has come to his sister, my dear mother, to help to make her old age as sunny and as pleasant as even I could wish.

And as for me—the poor string upon which these beads

are strung—I dare scarce say another word about myself, lest this, which I had meant to be the last word of a chapter should grow into the first words of a new one. Had I not taken up my pen to tell you a story of the land, I might, perchance, have made a better one of the sea; but the one frame cannot hold two opposite pictures. The day may come when I shall write down all that I remember of the greatest battle ever fought upon salt water, and how my father's gallant life was brought to an end as, with his paint rubbing against a French eighty-gun ship on one side and a Spanish seventy-four upon the other, he stood eating an apple in the break of his poop. I saw the smoke banks on that October evening swirl slowly up over the Atlantic swell, and rise, and rise, until they had shredded into thinnest air, and lost themselves in the infinite blue of heaven. And with them rose the cloud which had hung over the country; and it also thinned and thinned, until God's own sun of peace and security was shining once more upon us, never more, we hope, to be bedimmed.

UNCLE BERNAC

A MEMORY OF THE EMPIRE

1. *The Coast of France*

I DARE say that I had already read my uncle's letter a hundred times, and I am sure that I knew it by heart. None the less I took it out of my pocket, and, sitting on the side of the lugger, I went over it again with as much attention as if it were for the first time. It was written in a prim, angular hand, such as one might expect from a man who had begun life as a village attorney, and it was addressed to Louis de Laval, to the care of William Hargreaves, of the Green Man in Ashford, Kent. The landlord had many a hogshead of untaxed French brandy from the Normandy coast, and the letter had found its way by the same hands.

"My dear nephew Louis," said the letter, "now that your father is dead, and that you are alone in the world, I am sure that you will not wish to carry on the feud which has existed between the two halves of the family. At the time of the troubles your father was drawn towards the side of the King, and I towards that of the people, and it ended, as you know, by his having to fly from the country, and by my becoming the possessor of the estates of Grosbois. No doubt it is very hard that you should find yourself in a different position to your ancestors, but I am sure that you would rather that the land should be held by a Bernac than by a stranger. From the brother of your mother you will at least always meet with sympathy and consideration.

"And now I have some advice for you. You know that I have always been a Republican, but it has become evident to me that there is no use in fighting against fate, and that Napoleon's power is far too great to be shaken.

This being so, I have tried to serve him, for it is well to howl when you are among wolves. I have been able to do so much for him that he has become my very good friend, so that I may ask him what I like in return. He is now, as you are probably aware, with the army at Boulogne, within a few miles of Grosbois. If you will come over at once he will certainly forget the hostility of your father in consideration of the services of your uncle. It is true that your name is still proscribed, but my influence with the Emperor will set that matter right. Come to me, then, come at once, and come with confidence.

"Your uncle,
"C. BERNAC."

So much for the letter, but it was the outside which had puzzled me most. A seal of red wax had been affixed at either end, and my uncle had apparently used his thumb as a signet. One could see the little rippling edges of a coarse skin imprinted upon the wax. And then above one of the seals there was written in English the two words, "Don't come." It was hastily scrawled, and whether by a man or a woman it was impossible to say; but there it stared me in the face, that sinister addition to an invitation.

"Don't come!" Had it been added by this unknown uncle of mine on account of some sudden change in his plans? Surely that was inconceivable, for why in that case should he send the invitation at all? Or was it placed there by someone else who wished to warn me from accepting this offer of hospitality? The letter was in French. The warning was in English. Could it have been added in England? But the seals were unbroken, and how could anyone in England know what were the contents of the letter?

And then, as I sat there with the big sail humming like a shell above my head and the green water hissing beside me, I thought over all that I had heard of this uncle of

mine. My father, the descendant of one of the proudest and oldest families in France, had chosen beauty and virtue rather than rank in his wife. Never for an hour had she given him cause to regret it; but this lawyer brother of hers had, as I understood, offended my father by his slavish obsequiousness in days of prosperity and his venomous enmity in the days of trouble. He had hounded on the peasants until my family had been compelled to fly from the country, and had afterwards aided Robespierre in his worst excesses, receiving as a reward the castle and estate of Grosbois, which was our own. At the fall of Robespierre he had succeeded in conciliating Barras, and through every successive change he still managed to gain a fresh tenure of the property. Now it appeared from his letter that the new Emperor of France had also taken his part, though why he should befriend a man with such a history, and what service my Republican uncle could possibly render to him, were matters upon which I could form no opinion.

And now you will ask me, no doubt, why I should accept the invitation of such a man—a man whom my father had always stigmatised as a usurper and a traitor. It is easier to speak of it now than then, but the fact was that we of the new generation felt it very irksome and difficult to carry on the bitter quarrels of the last. To the older *emigrés* the clock of time seemed to have stopped in the year 1792, and they remained for ever with the loves and the hatreds of that era fixed indelibly upon their souls. They had been burned into them by the fiery furnace through which they had passed. But we, who had grown up upon a strange soil, understood that the world had moved, and that new issues had arisen. We were inclined to forget these feuds of the last generation. France to us was no longer the murderous land of the *sans-culotte* and the guillotine basket; it was rather the glorious queen of war, attacked by all and conquering all, but still so hard pressed that her scattered sons could hear her call to arms for ever sounding in their ears. It was

that call more than my uncle's letter which was taking me over the waters of the Channel.

For long my heart had been with my country in her struggle, and yet while my father lived I had never dared to say so ; for to him, who had served under Condé and fought at Quiberon, it would have seemed the blackest treason. But after his death there was no reason why I should not return to the land of my birth, and my desire was the stronger because Eugénie—the same Eugénie who has been thirty years my wife—was of the same way of thinking as myself. Her parents were a branch of the de Choiseuls, and their prejudices were even stronger than those of my father. Little did they think what was passing in the minds of their children. Many a time when they were mourning a French victory in the parlour we were both capering with joy in the garden. There was a little window, all choked round with laurel bushes, in the corner of the bare brick house, and there we used to meet at night, the dearer to each other from our difference with all who surrounded us. I would tell her my ambitions ; she would strengthen them by her enthusiasm. And so all was ready when the time came.

But there was another reason besides the death of my father and the receipt of this letter from my uncle. Ashford was becoming too hot to hold me. I will say this for the English, that they were very generous hosts to the French emigrants. There was not one of us who did not carry away a kindly remembrance of the land and its people. But in every country there are overbearing, swaggering folk, and even in quiet, sleepy Ashford we were plagued by them. There was one young Kentish squire, Farley was his name, who had earned a reputation in the town as a bully and a roisterer. He could not meet one of us without uttering insults not merely against the present French Government, which might have been excusable in an English patriot, but against France itself and all Frenchmen. Often we were forced to be deaf in his presence, but at last his conduct became so intoler-

able that I determined to teach him a lesson. There were several of us in the coffee-room at the Green Man one evening, and he, full of wine and malice, was heaping insults upon the French, his eyes creeping round to me every moment to see how I was taking it. "Now, Monsieur de Laval," he cried, putting his rude hand upon my shoulder, "here is a toast for you to drink. This is to the arm of Nelson which strikes down the French." He stood leering at me to see if I would drink it. "Well, sir," said I, "I will drink your toast if you will drink mine in return." "Come on, then!" said he. So we drank. "Now, monsieur, let us have your toast," said he. "Fill your glass, then," said I. "It is full now." "Well, then, here's to the cannon-ball which carried off that arm!" In an instant I had a glass of port wine running down my face, and within an hour a meeting had been arranged. I shot him through the shoulder, and that night, when I came to the little window, Eugénie plucked off some of the laurel leaves and stuck them in my hair.

There were no legal proceedings about the duel, but it made my position a little difficult in the town, and it will explain, with other things, why I had no hesitation in accepting my unknown uncle's invitation, in spite of the singular addition which I found upon the cover. If he had indeed sufficient influence with the Emperor to remove the proscription which was attached to our name, then the only barrier which shut me off from my country would be demolished.

You must picture me all this time as sitting upon the side of the lugger and turning my prospects and my position over in my head. My reverie was interrupted by the heavy hand of the English skipper dropping abruptly upon my arm.

"Now then, master," said he, "it's time you were stepping into the dingey."

I do not inherit the politics of the aristocrats, but I have never lost their sense of personal dignity. I gently

pushed away his polluting hand, and I remarked that we were still a long way from the shore.

"Well, you can do as you please," said he roughly; "I'm going no nearer, so you can take your choice of getting into the dingey or of swimming for it."

It was in vain that I pleaded that he had been paid his price. I did not add that that price meant that the watch which had belonged to three generations of de Lavals was now lying in the shop of a Dover goldsmith.

"Little enough, too!" he cried harshly. "Down sail, Jim, and bring her to! Now, master, you can step over the side, or you can come back to Dover, but I don't take the *Vixen* a cable's length nearer to Ambleteuse Reef with this gale coming up from the sou'-west."

"In that case I shall go," said I.

"You can lay your life on that!" he answered, and laughed in so irritating a fashion that I half turned upon him with the intention of chastising him. One is very helpless with these fellows, however, for a serious affair is of course out of the question, while if one uses a cane upon them they have a vile habit of striking with their hands, which gives them an advantage. The Marquis de Chamfort told me that, when he first settled in Sutton at the time of the emigration, he lost a tooth when reproving an unruly peasant. I made the best of a necessity, therefore, and, shrugging my shoulders, I passed over the side of the lugger into the little boat. My bundle was dropped in after me—conceive to yourself the heir of all the de Lavals travelling with a single bundle for his baggage!—and two seamen pushed her off, pulling with long slow strokes towards the low-lying shore.

There was certainly every promise of a wild night, for the dark cloud which had rolled up over the setting sun was now frayed and ragged at the edges, extending a good third of the way across the heavens. It had split low down near the horizon, and the crimson glare of the sunset beat through the gap, so that there was the appearance of fire with a monstrous reek of smoke. A red

dancing belt of light lay across the broad slate-coloured ocean, and in the centre of it the little black craft was wallowing and tumbling. The two seamen kept looking up at the heavens, and then over their shoulders at the land, and I feared every moment that they would put back before the gale burst. I was filled with apprehension every time when the end of their pull turned their faces skyward, and it was to draw their attention away from the storm-drift that I asked them what the lights were which had begun to twinkle through the dusk both to the right and to the left of us.

"That's Boulogne to the north, and Etaples upon the south," said one of the seamen civilly.

Boulogne! Etaples! How the words came back to me! It was to Boulogne that in my boyhood we had gone down for the summer bathing. Could I not remember as a little lad trotting along by my father's side as he paced the beach, and wondering why every fisherman's cap flew off at our approach? And as to Etaples, it was thence that we had fled for England, when the folks came raving to the pier-head as we passed, and I joined my thin voice to my father's as he shrieked back at them, for a stone had broken my mother's knee, and we were all frenzied with our fear and our hatred. And here they were, these places of my childhood, twinkling to the north and south of me, while there, in the darkness between them, and only ten miles off at the furthest, lay my own castle, my own land of Grosbois, where the men of my blood had lived and died long before some of us had gone across with Duke William to conquer the proud island over the water. How I strained my eager eyes through the darkness as I thought that the distant black keep of our fortalice might even now be visible!

"Yes, sir," said the seaman, "'tis a fine stretch of lonesome coast, and many is the cock of your hackle that I have helped ashore there."

"What do you take me for, then?" I asked.

"Well, 'tis no business of mine, sir," he answered.

" There are some trades that had best not even be spoken about."

" You think that I am a conspirator ? "

" Well, master, since you have put a name to it. Lor' love you, sir, we're used to it."

" I give you my word that I am none."

" An escaped prisoner, then ? "

" No, nor that either."

The man leaned upon his oar, and I could see in the gloom that his face was thrust forward, and that it was wrinkled with suspicion.

" If you're one of Boney's spies——" he cried.

" I ! A spy ! " The tone of my voice was enough to convince him.

" Well," said he, " I'm darned if I know what you are. But if you'd been a spy I'd ha' had no hand in landing you, whatever the skipper might say."

" Mind you, I've no word to say against Boney," said the other seaman, speaking in a very thick rumbling voice. " He's been a rare good friend to the poor mariner."

It surprised me to hear him speak so, for the virulence of feeling against the new French Emperor in England exceeded all belief, and high and low were united in their hatred of him ; but the sailor soon gave me a clue to his politics.

" If the poor mariner can run in his little bit of coffee and sugar, and run out his silk and his brandy, he has Boney to thank for it," said he. " The merchants have had their spell, and now it's the turn of the poor mariner."

I remembered then that Buonaparte was personally very popular amongst the smugglers, as well he might be, seeing that he had made over into their hands all the trade of the Channel. The seaman continued to pull with his left hand, but he pointed with his right over the slate-coloured dancing waters.

" There's Boney himself," said he.

You who live in a quieter age cannot conceive the thrill which these simple words sent through me. It was but

ten years since we had first heard of this man with the curious Italian name—think of it, ten years, the time that it takes for a private to become a non-commissioned officer, or a clerk to win a fifty-pound advance in his salary. He had sprung in an instant out of nothing into everything. One month people were asking who he was, the next he had broken out in the north of Italy like the plague; Venice and Genoa withered at the touch of this swarthy ill-nourished boy. He cowed the soldiers in the field, and he outwitted the statesmen in the council chamber. With a frenzy of energy he rushed to the east, and then, while men were still marvelling at the way in which he had converted Egypt into a French department, he was back again in Italy and had beaten Austria for the second time to the earth. He travelled as quickly as the rumour of his coming; and where he came there were new victories, new combinations, the crackling of old systems and the blurring of ancient lines of frontier. Holland, Savoy, Switzerland—they were become mere names upon the map. France was eating into Europe in every direction. They had made him Emperor, this beardless artillery officer, and without an effort he had crushed down those Republicans before whom the oldest king and the proudest nobility of Europe had been helpless. So it came about that we, who watched him dart from place to place like the shuttle of destiny, and who heard his name always in connection with some new achievement and some new success, had come at last to look upon him as something more than human, something monstrous, overshadowing France and menacing Europe. His giant presence loomed over the continent, and so deep was the impression which his fame had made in my mind that, when the English sailor pointed confidently over the darkening waters, and cried "There's Boney!" I looked up for the instant with a foolish expectation of seeing some gigantic figure, some elemental creature, dark, inchoate, and threatening, brooding over the waters of the Channel. Even now, after the long gap of years and the knowledge

of his downfall, that great man casts his spell upon you, but all that you read and all that you hear cannot give you an idea of what his name meant in the days when he was at the summit of his career.

What actually met my eye was very different from this childish expectation of mine. To the north there was a long low cape, the name of which has now escaped me. In the evening light it had been of the same greyish green tint as the other headlands ; but now, as the darkness fell, it gradually broke into a dull glow, like a cooling iron. On that wild night, seen and lost with the heave and sweep of the boat, this lurid streak carried with it a vague but sinister suggestion. The red line splitting the darkness might have been a giant half-forged sword-blade with its point towards England.

" What is it, then ? " I asked.

" Just what I say, master," said he. " It's one of Boney's armies, with Boney himself in the middle of it as like as not. Them is their camp fires, and you'll see a dozen such between this and Ostend. He's audacious enough to come across, is little Boney, if he could dowse Lord Nelson's other eye ; but there's no chance for him until then, and well he knows it."

" How can Lord Nelson know what he is doing ? " I asked.

The man pointed out over my shoulder into the darkness, and far on the horizon I perceived three little twinkling lights.

" Watch dog," said he, in his husky voice.

" *Andromeda.* Forty-four," added his companion.

I have often thought of them since, the long glow upon the land, and the three little lights upon the sea, standing for so much, for the two great rivals face to face, for the power of the land and the power of the water, for the centuries-old battle, which may last for centuries to come. And yet, Frenchman as I am, do I not know that the struggle is already decided ?—for it lies between the childless nation and that which has a lusty young brood

springing up around her. If France falls she dies, but if England falls how many nations are there who will carry her speech, her traditions and her blood on into the history of the future ?

The land had been looming darker, and the thudding of the waves upon the sand sounded louder every instant upon my ears. I could already see the quick dancing gleam of the surf in front of me. Suddenly, as I peered through the deepening shadow, a long dark boat shot out from it, like a trout from under a stone, making straight in our direction.

" A guard boat ! " cried one of the seamen.

" Bill, boy, we're done ! " said the other, and began to stuff something into his sea boot.

But the boat swerved at the sight of us, like a shying horse, and was off in another direction as fast as eight frantic oars could drive her. The seamen stared after her and wiped their brows. " Her conscience don't seem much easier than our own," said one of them. " I made sure it was the preventives."

" Looks to me as if you weren't the only queer cargo on the coast to-night, mister," remarked his comrade. " What could she be ? "

" Cursed if I know what she was. I rammed a cake of good Trinidad tobacco into my boot when I saw her. I've seen the inside of a French prison before now. Give way, Bill, and have it over."

A minute later, with a low grating sound, we ran aground upon a gravelly beach. My bundle was thrown ashore, I stepped after it, and a seaman pushed the prow off again, springing in as his comrade backed her into deep water. Already the glow in the west had vanished, the storm-cloud was half up the heavens, and a thick blackness had gathered over the ocean. As I turned to watch the vanishing boat a keen wet blast flapped in my face, and the air was filled with the high piping of the wind and with the deep thunder of the sea.

And thus it was that, on a wild evening in the early

spring of the year 1805, I, Louis de Laval, being in the twenty-first year of my age, returned, after an exile of thirteen years, to the country of which my family had for many centuries been the ornament and support. She had treated us badly, this country ; she has repaid our services by insult, exile and confiscation. But all that was forgotten as I, the only de Laval of the new generation, dropped upon my knees upon her sacred soil, and, with the strong smell of the seaweed in my nostrils, pressed my lips upon the wet and pringling gravel.

2. *The Salt-marsh*

WHEN a man has reached his mature age he can rest at that point of vantage, and cast his eyes back at the long road along which he has travelled, lying with its gleams of sunshine and its stretches of shadow in the valley behind him. He knows then its whence and its whither, and the twists and bends which were so full of promise or of menace as he approached them lie exposed and open to his gaze. So plain is it all that he can scarce remember how dark it may have seemed to him, or how long he once hesitated at the cross roads. Thus when he tries to recall each stage of the journey he does so with the knowledge of its end, and can no longer make it clear, even to himself, how it may have seemed to him at the time. And yet, in spite of the strain of years, and the many passages which have befallen me since, there is no time of my life which comes back so very clearly as that gusty evening, and to this day I cannot feel the briny wholesome whiff of the seaweed without being carried back, with that intimate feeling of reality which only the sense of smell can confer, to the wet shingle of the French beach.

When I had risen from my knees, the first thing that I did was to put my purse into the inner pocket of my coat. I had taken it out in order to give a gold piece to

the sailor who had handed me ashore, though I have little doubt that the fellow was both wealthier and of more assured prospects than myself. I had actually drawn out a silver half-crown, but I could not bring myself to offer it to him, and so ended by giving a tenth part of my whole fortune to a stranger. The other nine sovereigns I put very carefully away, and then, sitting down upon a flat rock just above high-water mark, I turned it all over in my mind and weighed what I should do. Already I was cold and hungry, with the wind lashing my face and the spray smarting in my eyes, but at least I was no longer living upon the charity of the enemies of my country, and the thought set my heart dancing within me. But the castle, as well as I could remember, was a good ten miles off. To go there now was to arrive at an unseemly hour, unkempt and weather-stained, before this uncle whom I had never seen. My sensitive pride conjured up a picture of the scornful faces of his servants as they looked out upon this bedraggled wanderer from England slinking back to the castle which should have been his own. No, I must seek shelter for the night, and then at my leisure, with as fair a show of appearances as possible, I must present myself before my relative. Where then could I find a refuge from the storm?

You will ask me, doubtless, why I did not make for Etaples or Boulogne. I answer that it was for the same reason which forced me to land secretly upon that forbidding coast. The name of de Laval still headed the list of the proscribed, for my father had been a famous and energetic leader of the small but influential body of men who had remained true at all costs to the old order of things. Do not think that, because I was of another way of thinking, I despised those who had given up so much for their principles. There is a curious saintlike trait in our natures which draws us most strongly towards that which involves the greatest sacrifice, and I have sometimes thought that if the conditions had been less onerous the Bourbons might have had fewer, or at least

less noble, followers. The French nobles had been more faithful to them than the English to the Stuarts, for Cromwell had no luxurious court or rich appointments which he could hold out to those who would desert the royal cause. No words can exaggerate the self-abnegation of those men. I have seen a supper party under my father's roof where our guests were two fencing-masters, three professors of language, one ornamental gardener, and one translator of books, who held his hand in the front of his coat to conceal a rent in the lapel. But these eight men were of the highest nobility of France, who might have had what they chose to ask if they would only consent to forget the past, and to throw themselves heartily into the new order of things. But the humble, and what is sadder the incapable, monarch of Hartwell still held the allegiance of those old Montmorencies, Rohans and Choiseuls, who, having shared the greatness of his family, were determined also to stand by it in its ruin. The dark chambers of that exiled monarch were furnished with something better than the tapestry of Gobelins or the china of Sèvres. Across the gulf which separates my old age from theirs I can still see those ill-clad, grave-mannered men, and I raise my hat to the noblest group of nobles that our history can show.

To visit a coast-town, therefore, before I had seen my uncle, or learnt whether my return had been sanctioned, would be simply to deliver myself into the hands of the *gens d'armes*, who were ever on the look-out for strangers from England. To go before the new Emperor was one thing and to be dragged before him another. On the whole, it seemed to me that my best course was to wander inland, in the hope of finding some empty barn or out-house, where I could pass the night unseen and undisturbed. Then in the morning I should consider how it was best for me to approach my uncle Bernac, and through him the new master of France.

The wind had freshened meanwhile into a gale, and it was so dark upon the seaward side that I could only catch

the white flash of a leaping wave here and there in the blackness. Of the lugger which had brought me from Dover I could see no sign. On the land side of me there seemed, as far as I could make it out, to be a line of low hills, but when I came to traverse them I found that the dim light had exaggerated their size, and that they were mere scattered sand-dunes, mottled with patches of bramble. Over these I toiled with my bundle slung over my shoulder, plodding heavily through the loose sand, and tripping over the creepers, but forgetting my wet clothes and my numb hands as I recalled the many hardships and adventures which my ancestors had undergone. It amused me to think that the day might come when my own descendants might fortify themselves by the recollection of that which was happening to me, for in a great family like ours the individual is always subordinate to the race.

It seemed to me that I should never get to the end of the sand-dunes, but when at last I did come off them I heartily wished that I was back upon them again; for the sea in that part comes by some creek up the back of the beach, forming at low tide a great desolate salt-marsh, which must be a forlorn place even in the daytime, but upon such a night as that it was a most dreary wilderness. At first it was but a softness of the ground, causing me to slip as I walked, but soon the mud was over my ankles and half-way up to my knees, so that each foot gave a loud flop as I raised it, and a dull splash as I set it down again. I would willingly have made my way out, even if I had to return to the sand-dunes, but in trying to pick my path I had lost all my bearings, and the air was so full of the sounds of the storm that the sea seemed to be on every side of me. I had heard of how one may steer oneself by observation of the stars, but my quiet English life had not taught me how such things were done, and had I known I could scarcely have profited by it, since the few stars which were visible peeped out here and there in the rifts of the flying storm-clouds. I wandered on then, wet

and weary, trusting to fortune, but always blundering deeper and deeper into this horrible bog, until I began to think that my first night in France was destined also to be my last, and that the heir of the de Lavals was destined to perish of cold and misery in the depths of this obscene morass.

I must have toiled for many miles in this dreary fashion, sometimes coming upon shallower mud and sometimes upon deeper, but never making my way on to the dry, when I perceived through the gloom something which turned my heart even heavier than it had been before. This was a curious clump of some whitish shrub—cotton-grass of a flowering variety—which glimmered suddenly before me in the darkness. Now an hour earlier I had passed just such a square-headed, whitish clump ; so that I was confirmed in the opinion which I had already begun to form, that I was wandering in a circle. To make it certain I stooped down, striking a momentary flash from my tinder-box, and there sure enough was my own old track very clearly marked in the brown mud in front of me. At this confirmation of my worst fears I threw my eyes up to heaven in my despair, and there I saw something which for the first time gave me a clue in the uncertainty which surrounded me.

It was nothing else than a glimpse of the moon between two flowing clouds. This in itself might have been of small avail to me, but over its white face was marked a long thin V, which shot swiftly across like a shiftless arrow. It was a flock of wild ducks, and its flight was in the same direction as that towards which my face was turned. Now, I had observed in Kent how all these creatures come further inland when there is rough weather breaking, so I made no doubt that their course indicated the path which would lead me away from the sea. I struggled on, therefore, taking every precaution to walk in a straight line, above all being very careful to make a stride of equal length with either leg, until at last, after half an hour or so, my perseverance was rewarded by the welcome sight

of a little yellow light, as from a cottage window, glimmering through the darkness. Ah, how it shone through my eyes and down into my heart, glowing and twinkling there, that little golden speck, which meant food, and rest, and life itself to the wanderer! I blundered towards it through the mud and the slush as fast as my weary legs would bear me. I was too cold and miserable to refuse any shelter, and I had no doubt that for the sake of one of my gold pieces the fisherman or peasant who lived in this strange situation would shut his eyes to whatever might be suspicious in my presence or appearance.

As I approached it became more and more wonderful to me that anyone should live there at all, for the bog grew worse rather than better, and in the occasional gleams of moonshine I could make out that the water lay in glimmering pools all round the low dark cottage from which the light was breaking. I could see now that it shone through a small square window. As I approached the gleam was suddenly obscured, and there in a yellow frame appeared the round black outline of a man's head peering out into the darkness. A second time it appeared before I reached the cottage, and there was something in the stealthy manner in which it peeped and whisked away, and peeped once more, which filled me with surprise, and with a certain vague apprehension.

So cautious were the movements of this sentinel, and so singular the position of his watch-house, that I determined, in spite of my misery, to see something more of him before I trusted myself to the shelter of his roof. And, indeed, the amount of shelter which I might hope for was not very great, for as I drew softly nearer I could see that the light from within was beating through at several points, and that the whole cottage was in the most crazy state of disrepair. For a moment I paused, thinking that even the salt-marsh might perhaps be a safer resting-place for the night than the headquarters of some desperate smugglers, for such I conjectured that this lonely dwelling must be. The scud, however, had

covered the moon once more, and the darkness was so pitchy black that I felt that I might reconnoitre a little more closely without fear of discovery. Walking on tiptoe I approached the little window and looked in.

What I saw reassured me vastly. A small wood fire was crackling in one of those old-fashioned country grates, and beside it was seated a strikingly handsome young man, who was reading earnestly out of a fat little book. He had an oval, olive-tinted face, with long black hair, ungathered in a queue, and there was something of the poet or of the artist in his whole appearance. The sight of that refined face, and of the warm yellow fire-light which beat upon it, was a very cheering one to a cold and famished traveller. I stood for an instant gazing at him, and noticing the way in which his full and somewhat loose-fitting lower lip quivered continually, as if he were repeating to himself that which he was reading. I was still looking at him when he put his book down upon the table and approached the window. Catching a glimpse of my figure in the darkness he called out something which I could not hear, and waved his hand in a gesture of welcome. An instant later the door flew open, and there was his thin tall figure standing upon the threshold, with his skirts flapping in the wind.

"My dear friends," he cried, peering out into the gloom with his hand over his eyes to screen them from the salt-laden wind and driving sand, "I had given you up. I thought that you were never coming. I've been waiting for two hours."

For answer I stepped out in front of him, so that the light fell upon my face.

"I am afraid, sir——" said I.

But I had no time to finish my sentence. He struck at me with both hands like an angry cat, and, springing back into the room, he slammed the door with a crash in my face.

The swiftness of his movements and the malignity of his gesture were in such singular contrast with his appear-

ance that I was struck speechless with surprise. But as I stood there with the door in front of me I was a witness to something which filled me with even greater astonishment.

I have already said that the cottage was in the last stage of disrepair. Amidst the many seams and cracks through which the light was breaking there was one along the whole of the hinge side of the door which gave me from where I was standing a view of the further end of the room, at which the fire was burning. As I gazed then I saw this man reappear in front of the fire, fumbling furiously with both his hands in his bosom, and then with a spring he disappeared up the chimney, so that I could only see his shoes and half of his black calves as he stood upon the brickwork at the side of the grate. In an instant he was down again and back at the door.

"Who are you?" he cried, in a voice which seemed to me to be thrilling with some strong emotion.

"I am a traveller, and have lost my way."

There was a pause as if he were thinking what course he should pursue.

"You will find little here to tempt you to stay," said he at last.

"I am weary and spent, sir; and surely you will not refuse me shelter. I have been wandering for hours in the salt-marsh."

"Did you meet anyone there?" he asked eagerly.

"No."

"Stand back a little from the door. This is a wild place, and the times are troublesome. A man must take precautions."

I took a few steps back, and he then opened the door sufficiently to allow his head to come through. He said nothing, but he looked at me for a long time in a very searching manner.

"What is your name?"

"Louis Laval," said I, thinking that it might sound less dangerous in this plebeian form.

"Whither are you going?"

"I wish to reach some shelter."

"You are from England?"

"I am from the coast."

He shook his head slowly to show me how little my replies had satisfied him.

"You cannot come in here," said he.

"But surely——"

"No, no, it is impossible."

"Show me then how to find my way out of the marsh."

"It is easy enough. If you go a few hundred paces in that direction you will perceive the lights of a village. You are already almost free of the marsh."

He stepped a pace or two from the door in order to point the way for me, and then turned upon his heel. I had already taken a stride or two away from him and his inhospitable hut, when he suddenly called after me.

"Come, Monsieur Laval," said he, with quite a different ring in his voice; "I really cannot permit you to leave me upon so tempestuous a night. A warm by my fire and a glass of brandy will hearten you upon your way."

You may think that I did not feel disposed to contradict him, though I could make nothing of this sudden and welcome change in his manner.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," said I.

And I followed him into the hut.

3. *The Ruined Cottage*

IT was delightful to see the glow and twinkle of the fire and to escape from the wet wind and the numbing cold, but my curiosity had already risen so high about this lonely man and his singular dwelling that my thoughts ran rather upon that than upon my personal comfort. There was his remarkable appearance, the fact that he

should be awaiting company within that miserable ruin in the heart of the morass at so sinister an hour, and finally the inexplicable incident of the chimney, all of which excited my imagination. It was beyond my comprehension why he should at one moment charge me sternly to continue my journey, and then, in almost the same breath, invite me most cordially to seek the shelter of his hut. On all these points I was keenly on the alert for an explanation. Yet I endeavoured to conceal my feelings, and to assume the air of a man who finds everything quite natural about him, and who is much too absorbed in his own personal wants to have a thought to spare upon anything outside himself.

A glance at the inside of the cottage, as I entered, confirmed me in the conjecture which the appearance of the outside had already given rise to, that it was not used for human residence, and that this man was only here for a rendezvous. Prolonged moisture had peeled the plaster in flakes from the walls, and had covered the stones with blotches and rosettes of lichen. The whole place was rotten and scaling like a leper. The single large room was unfurnished save for a crazy table, three wooden boxes which might be used as seats, and a great pile of decayed fishing-net in the corner. The splinters of a fourth box, with a hand-axe, which leaned against the wall, showed how the wood for the fire had been gathered. But it was to the table that my gaze was chiefly drawn, for there, beside the lamp and the book, lay an open basket, from which projected the knuckle-end of a ham, the corner of a loaf of bread, and the black neck of a bottle.

If my host had been suspicious and cold at our first meeting he was now atoning for his inhospitality by an overdone cordiality even harder for me to explain. With many lamentations over my mud-stained and sodden condition, he drew a box close to the blaze and cut me off a corner of the bread and ham. I could not help observing, however, that though his loose under-lipped mouth was wreathed with smiles, his beautiful dark eyes were

continually running over me and my attire, asking and re-asking what my business might be.

" As for myself," said he, with an air of false candour, " you will very well understand that in these days a worthy merchant must do the best he can to get his wares, and if the Emperor, God save him, sees fit in his wisdom to put an end to open trade, one must come to such places as these to get into touch with those who bring across the coffee and the tobacco. I promise you that in the Tuileries itself there is no difficulty about getting either one or the other, and the Emperor drinks his ten cups a day of the real Mocha without asking questions, though he must know that it is not grown within the confines of France. The vegetable kingdom still remains one of the few which Napoleon has not yet conquered, and, if it were not for traders, who are at some risk and inconvenience, it is hard to say what we should do for our supplies. I suppose, sir, that you are not yourself either in the seafaring or in the trading line ? "

I contented myself by answering that I was not, by which reticence I could see that I only excited his curiosity the more. As to his account of himself, I read a lie in those tell-tale eyes all the time that he was talking. As I looked at him now in the full light of the lamp and the fire, I could see that he was even more good-looking than I had at first thought, but with a type of beauty which has never been to my taste. His features were so refined as to be almost effeminate, and so regular that they would have been perfect if it had not been for that ill-fitting, slabbing mouth. It was a clever, and yet it was a weak face, full of a sort of fickle enthusiasm and feeble impulsiveness. I felt that the more I knew him the less reason I should probably find either to like him or to fear him, and in my first conclusion I was right, although I had occasion to change my views upon the second.

" You will forgive me, Monsieur Laval, if I was a little cold at first," said he. " Since the Emperor has been upon the coast the place swarms with police agents, so

that a trader must look to his own interests. You will allow that my fears of you were not unnatural, since neither your dress nor your appearance were such as one would expect to meet with in such a place and at such a time."

It was on my lips to return the remark, but I refrained.

"I can assure you," said I, "that I am merely a traveller who have lost my way. Now that I am refreshed and rested I will not encroach further upon your hospitality, except to ask you to point out the way to the nearest village."

"Tut; you had best stay where you are, for the night grows wilder every instant." As he spoke there came a whoop and scream of wind in the chimney, as if the old place were coming down about our ears. He walked across to the window and looked very earnestly out of it, just as I had seen him do upon my first approach. "The fact is, Monsieur Laval," said he, looking round at me with his false air of good fellowship, "you may be of some good service to me if you will wait here for half an hour or so."

"How so?" I asked, wavering between my distrust and my curiosity.

"Well, to be frank with you"—and never did a man look less frank as he spoke—"I am waiting here for some of those people with whom I do business; but in some way they have not come yet, and I am inclined to take a walk round the marsh on the chance of finding them, if they have lost their way. On the other hand, it would be exceedingly awkward for me if they were to come here in my absence and imagine that I am gone. I should take it as a favour, then, if you would remain here for half an hour or so, that you may tell them how matters stand if I should chance to miss them."

The request seemed reasonable enough, and yet there was that same oblique glance which told me that it was false. Still, I could not see what harm could come to me by complying with his request, and certainly I could

not have devised any arrangement which would give me such an opportunity of satisfying my curiosity. What was in that wide stone chimney, and why had he clambered up there upon the sight of me? My adventure would be inconclusive indeed if I did not settle that point before I went on with my journey.

"Well," said he, snatching up his black broad-brimmed hat and running very briskly to the door, "I am sure that you will not refuse me my request, and I must delay no longer or I shall never get my business finished." He closed the door hurriedly behind him, and I heard the splashing of his footsteps until they were lost in the howling of the gale.

And so the mysterious cottage was mine to ransack if I could pluck its secrets from it. I lifted the book which had been left upon the table. It was Rousseau's *Social Contract*—excellent literature, but hardly what one would expect a trader to carry with him whilst awaiting an appointment with smugglers. On the fly-leaf was written "Lucien Lesage," and beneath it, in a woman's hand, "Lucien, from Sibylle." Lesage, then, was the name of my good-looking but sinister acquaintance. It only remained for me now to discover what it was which he had concealed up the chimney. I listened intently, and as there was no sound from without save the cry of the storm, I stepped on to the edge of the grate as I had seen him do, and sprang up by the side of the fire.

It was a very broad, old-fashioned cottage chimney, so that standing on one side I was not inconvenienced either by the heat or by the smoke, and the bright glare from below showed me in an instant that for which I sought. There was a recess at the back, caused by the fall or removal of one of the stones, and in this was lying a small bundle. There could not be the least doubt that it was this which the fellow had striven so frantically to conceal upon the first alarm of the approach of a stranger. I took it down and held it to the light.

It was a small square of yellow glazed cloth tied round

with white tape. Upon my opening it a number of letters appeared, and a single large paper folded up. The addresses upon the letters took my breath away. The first that I glanced at was to Citizen Talleyrand. The others were in the Republican style addressed to Citizen Fouche, to Citizen Soult, to Citizen MacDonald, to Citizen Berthier, and so on through the whole list of famous names in war and in diplomacy who were the pillars of the new Empire. What in the world could this pretended merchant of coffee have to write to all these great notables about? The other paper would explain, no doubt. I laid the letters upon the shelf and I unfolded the paper which had been enclosed with them. It did not take more than the opening sentence to convince me that the salt-marsh outside might prove to be a very much safer place than this accursed cottage.

These were the words which met my eyes :—

" Fellow-citizens of France. The deed of to-day has proved that, even in the midst of his troops, a tyrant is unable to escape the vengeance of an outraged people. The committee of three, acting temporarily for the Republic, has awarded to Buonaparte the same fate which has already befallen Louis Capet. In avenging the outrage of the 18th Brumaire——"

So far I had got when my heart sprang suddenly into my mouth and the paper fluttered down from my fingers. A grip of iron had closed suddenly round each of my ankles, and there in the light of the fire I saw two hands which, even in that terrified glance, I perceived to be covered with black hair and of an enormous size.

" So, my friend," cried a thundering voice, " this time, at least, we have been too many for you."

4. *Men of the Night*

I HAD little time given me to realise the extraordinary and humiliating position in which I found myself, for I was lifted up by my ankles, as if I were a fowl pulled off a perch, and jerked roughly down into the room, my back striking upon the stone floor with a thud which shook the breath from my body.

"Don't kill him yet, Toussac," said a soft voice. "Let us make sure who he is first."

I felt the pressure of a thumb upon my chin and of fingers upon my throat, and my head was slowly forced round until the strain became unbearable.

"Quarter of an inch does it and no mark," said the thunderous voice. "You can trust my old turn."

"Don't, Toussac; don't!" said the same gentle voice which had spoken first. "I saw you do it once before, and the horrible snick that it made haunted me for a long time. To think that the sacred flame of life can be so readily snuffed out by that great material finger and thumb! Mind can indeed conquer matter, but the fighting must not be at close quarters."

My neck was so twisted that I could not see any of these people who were discussing my fate. I could only lie and listen.

"The fact remains, my dear Charles, that the fellow has our all-important secret, and that it is our lives or his." I recognised in the voice which was now speaking that of the man of the cottage. "We owe it to ourselves to put it out of his power to harm us. Let him sit up, Toussac, for there is no possibility of his escaping."

Some irresistible force at the back of my neck dragged me instantly into a sitting position, and so for the first time I was able to look round me in a dazed fashion, and to see these men into whose hands I had fallen. That they were murderers in the past and had murderous plans for the future I already gathered from what I had heard

and seen. I understood also that in the heart of that lonely marsh I was absolutely in their power. None the less, I remembered the name that I bore, and I concealed as far as I could the sickening terror which lay at my heart.

There were three of them in the room, my former acquaintance and two new-comers. Lesage stood by the table, with his fat brown book in his hand, looking at me with a composed face, but with that humorous questioning twinkle in his eyes which a master chess-player might assume when he had left his opponent without a move. On the top of the box beside him sat a very ascetic-faced, yellow, hollow-eyed man of fifty, with prim lips and a shrunken skin, which hung loosely over the long jerking tendons under his prominent chin. He was dressed in snuff-coloured clothes, and his legs under his knee-breeches were of a ludicrous thinness. He shook his head at me with an air of sad wisdom, and I could read little comfort in his inhuman grey eyes. But it was the man called Toussac who alarmed me most. He was a colossus ; bulky rather than tall, but misshapen from his excess of muscle. His huge legs were crooked like those of a great ape ; and, indeed, there was something animal about his whole appearance, for he was bearded up to his eyes, and it was a paw rather than a hand which still clutched me by the collar. As to his expression, he was too thatched with hair to show one, but his large black eyes looked with a sinister questioning from me to the others. If they were the judge and jury, it was clear who was to be executioner.

"Whence did he come? What is his business? How came he to know the hiding-place?" asked the thin man.

"When he first came I mistook him for you in the darkness," Lesage answered. "You will acknowledge that it was not a night on which one would expect to meet many people in the salt-marsh. On discovering my mistake I shut the door and concealed the papers in the

chimney. I had forgotten that he might see me do this through that crack by the hinges, but when I went out again, to show him his way and so get rid of him, my eye caught the gap, and I at once realised that he had seen my action, and that it must have aroused his curiosity to such an extent that it would be quite certain that he would think and speak of it. I called him back into the hut, therefore, in order that I might have time to consider what I had best do with him."

"Sapristi! a couple of cuts of that wood-axe, and a bed in the softest corner of the marsh, would have settled the business at once," said the fellow by my side.

"Quite true, my good Toussac; but it is not usual to lead off with your ace of trumps. A little delicacy—a little finesse——"

"Let us hear what you did then?"

"It was my first object to learn whether this man Laval——"

"What did you say his name was?" cried the thin man.

"His name, according to his account, is Laval. My first object then was to find out whether he had in truth seen me conceal the papers or not. It was an important question for us, and, as things have turned out, more important still for him. I made my little plan, therefore. I waited until I saw you approach, and I then left him alone in the hut. I watched through the window and saw him fly to the hiding-place. We then entered, and I asked you, Toussac, to be good enough to lift him down —and there he lies."

The young fellow looked proudly round for the applause of his comrades, and the thin man clapped his hands softly together, looking very hard at me while he did so.

"My dear Lesage," said he, "you have certainly excelled yourself. When our new republic looks for its minister of police we shall know where to find him. I confess that when, after guiding Toussac to this shelter, I followed you in and perceived a gentleman's legs pro-

jecting from the fireplace, even my wits, which are usually none of the slowest, hardly grasped the situation. Toussac, however, grasped the legs. He is always practical, the good Toussac."

"Enough words!" growled the hairy creature beside me. "It is because we have talked instead of acting that this Buonaparte has a crown upon his head or a head upon his shoulders. Let us have done with the fellow and come to business."

The refined features of Lesage made me look towards him as to a possible protector, but his large dark eyes were as cold and hard as jet as he looked back at me.

"What Toussac says is right," said he. "We imperil our own safety if he goes with our secret."

"The devil take our own safety!" cried Toussac. "What has that to do with the matter? We imperil the success of our plans—that is of more importance."

"The two things go together," replied Lesage. "There is no doubt that Rule 13 of our confederation defines exactly what should be done in such a case. Any responsibility must rest with the passers of Rule 13."

My heart had turned cold when this man with his poet's face supported the savage at my side. But my hopes were raised again when the thin man, who had said little hitherto, though he had continued to stare at me very intently, began now to show some signs of alarm at the bloodthirsty proposals of his comrades.

"My dear Lucien," said he, in a soothing voice, laying his hand upon the young man's arm, "we philosophers and reasoners must have a respect for human life. The tabernacle is not to be lightly violated. We have frequently agreed that if it were not for the excesses of Marat——"

"I have every respect for your opinion, Charles," the other interrupted. "You will allow that I have always been a willing and obedient disciple. But I again say that our personal safety is involved, and that, as far as I see, there is no middle course. No one could be more

averse from cruelty than I am, but you were present with me some months ago when Toussac silenced the man from Bow Street, and certainly it was done with such dexterity that the process was probably more painful to the spectators than to the victim. He could not have been aware of the horrible sound which announced his own dissolution. If you and I had constancy enough to endure this—and if I remember right it was chiefly at your instigation that the deed was done—then surely on this more vital occasion——"

"No, no, Toussac, stop!" cried the thin man, his voice rising from its soft tones to a perfect scream as the giant's hairy hand gripped me by the chin once more. "I appeal to you, Lucien, upon practical as well as upon moral grounds, not to let this deed be done. Consider that if things should go against us this will cut us off from all hopes of mercy. Consider also——"

This argument seemed for a moment to stagger the younger man, whose olive complexion had turned a shade greyer.

"There will be no hope for us in any case, Charles," said he. "We have no choice but to obey Rule 13."

"Some latitude is allowed to us. We are ourselves upon the inner committee."

"But it takes a quorum to change a rule, and we have no powers to do it." His pendulous lip was quivering, but there was no softening in his eyes. Slowly under the pressure of those cruel fingers my chin began to sweep round to my shoulder, and I commended my soul to the Virgin and to Saint Ignatius, who has always been the especial patron of my family. But this man Charles, who had already befriended me, darted forwards and began to tear at Toussac's hands with a vehemence which was very different from his former philosophic calm.

"You *shall* not kill him!" he cried angrily. "Who are you, to set your wills up against mine? Let him go, Toussac! Take your thumb from his chin! I won't have it done, I tell you!" Then, as he saw by the in-

flexible faces of his companions that blustering would not help him, he turned suddenly to tones of entreaty. "See, now! I'll make you a promise!" said he. "Listen to me, Lucien! Let me examine him! If he is a police spy he shall die! You may have him then, Toussac. But if he is only a harmless traveller, who has blundered in here by an evil chance, and who has been led by a foolish curiosity to inquire into our business, then you will leave him to me."

You will observe that from the beginning of this affair I had never once opened my mouth, nor said a word in my defence, which made me mightily pleased with myself afterwards, though my silence came rather from pride than from courage. To lose life and self-respect together was more than I could face. But now, at this appeal from my advocate, I turned my eyes from the monster who held me to the other who condemned me. The brutality of the one alarmed me less than the self-interested attitude of the other, for a man is never so dangerous as when he is afraid, and of all judges the judge who has cause to fear you is the most inflexible.

My life depended upon the answer which was to come to the appeal of my champion. Lesage tapped his fingers upon his teeth, and smiled indulgently at the earnestness of his companion.

"Rule 13! Rule 13!" he kept repeating, in that exasperating voice of his.

"I will take all responsibility."

"I'll tell you what, mister," said Toussac, in his savage voice. "There's another rule besides Rule 13, and that's the one that says that if any man shelters an offender he shall be treated as if he was himself guilty of the offence."

This attack did not shake the serenity of my champion in the least.

"You are an excellent man of action, Toussac," said he calmly; "but when it comes to choosing the right course, you must leave it to wiser heads than your own."

His air of tranquil superiority seemed to daunt the fierce creature who held me. He shrugged his huge shoulders in silent dissent.

"As to you, Lucien," my friend continued, "I am surprised, considering the position to which you aspire in my family, that you should for an instant stand in the way of any wish which I may express. If you have grasped the true principles of liberty, and if you are privileged to be one of the small band who have never despaired of the republic, to whom is it that you owe it?"

"Yes, yes, Charles; I acknowledge what you say," the young man answered, with much agitation. "I am sure that I should be the last to oppose any wish which you might express, but in this case I fear lest your tenderness of heart may be leading you astray. By all means ask him any questions that you like; but it seems to me that there can be only one end to the matter."

So I thought also; for, with the full secret of these desperate men in my possession, what hope was there that they would ever suffer me to leave the hut alive? And yet, so sweet is human life, and so dear a respite, be it ever so short a one, that when that murderous hand was taken from my chin I heard a sudden chiming of little bells, and the lamp blazed up into a strange fantastic blur. It was but for a moment, and then my mind was clear again, and I was looking up at the strange gaunt face of my examiner.

"Whence have you come?" he asked.

"From England."

"But you are French?"

"Yes."

"When did you arrive?"

"To-night."

"How?"

"In a lugger from Dover."

"The fellow is speaking the truth," growled Toussac. "Yes, I'll say that for him, that he is speaking the truth.

We saw the lugger, and someone was landed from it just after the boat that brought me over pushed off."

I remembered that boat, which had been the first thing which I had seen upon the coast of France. How little I had thought what it would mean to me !

And now my advocate began asking questions—vague, useless questions—in a slow, hesitating fashion which set Toussac grumbling. This cross-examination appeared to me to be a useless farce ; and yet there was a certain eagerness and intensity in my questioner's manner which gave me the assurance that he had some end in view. Was it merely that he wished to gain time ? Time for what ? And then, suddenly, with that quick perception which comes upon those whose nerves are strained by an extremity of danger, I became convinced that he really was awaiting something—that he was tense with expectation. I read it upon his drawn face, upon his sidelong head with his ear scooped into his hand, above all in his twitching, restless eyes. He expected an interruption, and he was talking, talking, talking, in order to gain time for it. I was as sure of it as if he had whispered his secret in my ear, and down in my numb, cold heart a warm little spring of hope began to bubble and run.

But Toussac had chafed at all this word-fencing, and now with an oath he broke in upon our dialogue.

" I have had enough of this ! " he cried. " It is not for child's play of this sort that I risked my head in coming over here. Have we nothing better to talk about than this fellow ? Do you suppose I came from London to listen to your fine phrases ? Have done with it, I say, and get to business."

" Very good," said my champion. " There's an excellent little cupboard here which makes as fine a prison as one could wish for. Let us put him in here, and pass on to business. We can deal with him when we have finished."

" And have him overhear all that we say," said Lesage.

" I don't know what the devil has come over you," cried Toussac, turning suspicious eyes upon my protector. " I never knew you squeamish before, and certainly you were not backward in the affair of the man from Bow Street. This fellow has our secret, and he must either die, or we shall see him at our trial. What is the sense of arranging a plot, and then at the last moment turning a man loose who will ruin us all ? Let us snap his neck and have done with it."

The great hairy hands were stretched towards me again, but Lesage had sprung suddenly to his feet. His face had turned very white, and he stood listening with his forefinger up and his head slanted. It was a long, thin, delicate hand, and it was quivering like a leaf in the wind.

" I heard something," he whispered.

" And I," said the older man.

" What was it ? "

" Silence. Listen ! "

For a minute or more we all stayed with straining ears while the wind still whimpered in the chimney or rattled the crazy window.

" It was nothing," said Lesage at last, with a nervous laugh. " The storm makes curious sounds sometimes."

" I heard nothing," said Toussac.

" Hush ! " cried the other. " There it is again ! "

A clear rising cry floated high above the wailing of the storm ; a wild, musical cry, beginning on a low note, and thrilling swiftly up to a keen, sharp-edged howl.

" A hound ! "

" They are following us ! "

Lesage dashed to the fireplace, and I saw him thrust his papers into the blaze and grind them down with his heel.

Toussac seized the wood-axe which leaned against the wall. The thin man dragged the pile of decayed netting from the corner, and opened a small wooden screen, which shut off a low recess.

" In here," he whispered, " quick ! "

And then, as I scrambled into my refuge, I heard him say to the others that I would be safe there, and that they could lay their hands upon me when they wished.

5. *The Law*

THE cupboard—for it was little more—into which I had been hurried was low and narrow, and I felt in the darkness that it was heaped with peculiar round wickerwork baskets, the nature of which I could by no means imagine, although I discovered afterwards that they were lobster traps. The only light which entered was through the cracks of the old broken door, but these were so wide and numerous that I could see the whole of the room which I had just quitted. Sick and faint, with the shadow of death still clouding my wits, I was none the less fascinated by the scene which lay before me.

My thin friend, with the same prim composure upon his emaciated face, had seated himself again upon the box. With his hands clasped round one of his knees he was rocking slowly backwards and forwards; and I noticed, in the lamplight, that his jaw muscles were contracting rhythmically, like the gills of a fish. Beside him stood Lesage, his white face glistening with moisture and his loose lip quivering with fear. Every now and then he would make a vigorous attempt to compose his features, but after each rally a fresh wave of terror would sweep everything before it, and set him shaking once more. As to Toussac, he stood before the fire, a magnificent figure, with the axe held down by his leg, and his head thrown back in defiance, so that his great black beard bristled straight out in front of him. He said not a word, but every fibre of his body was braced for a struggle. Then, as the howl of the hound rose louder and clearer from the marsh outside, he ran forward and threw open the door.

"No, no, keep the dog out!" cried Lesage in an agony of apprehension.

"You fool, our only chance is to kill it."

"But it is in leash."

"If it is in leash nothing can save us. But if, as I think, it is running free, then we may escape yet."

Lesage cowered up against the table, with his agonised eyes fixed upon the blue-black square of the door. The man who had befriended me still swayed his body about with a singular half-smile upon his face. His skinny hand was twitching at the frill of his shirt, and I conjectured that he held some weapon concealed there. Toussac stood between them and the open door, and, much as I feared and loathed him, I could not take my eyes from his gallant figure. As to myself, I was so much occupied by the singular drama before me, and by the impending fate of those three men of the cottage, that all thought of my own fortunes had passed completely out of my mind. On this mean stage a terrible all-absorbing drama was being played, and I, crouching in a squalid recess, was to be the sole spectator of it. I could but hold my breath and wait and watch.

And suddenly I became conscious that they could all three see something which was invisible to me. I read it from their tense faces and their staring eyes. Toussac swung his axe over his shoulder and poised himself for a blow. Lesage cowered away and put one hand between his eyes and the open door. The other ceased swinging his spindle legs and sat like a little brown image upon the edge of his box. There was a moist pattering of feet, a yellow streak shot through the doorway, and Toussac lashed at it as I have seen an English cricketer strike at a ball. His aim was true, for he buried the head of the hatchet in the creature's throat, but the force of his blow shattered his weapon, and the weight of the hound carried him backwards on to the floor. Over they rolled and over, the hairy man and the hairy dog, growling and worrying in a bestial combat. He was fumbling at the animal's

throat, and I could not see what he was doing, until it gave a sudden sharp yelp of pain, and there was a rending sound like the tearing of canvas. The man staggered up with his hands dripping, and the tawny mass with the blotch of crimson lay motionless upon the floor.

"Now!" cried Toussac in a voice of thunder, "now!" and he rushed from the hut.

Lesage had shrunk away into the corner in a frenzy of fear whilst Toussac had been killing the hound, but now he raised his agonised face, which was as wet as if he had dipped it into a basin.

"Yes, yes," he cried; "we must fly, Charles. The hound has left the police behind, and we may still escape."

But the other, with the same imperturbable face, motionless save for the rhythm of his jaw muscles, walked quietly over and closed the door upon the inside.

"I think, friend Lucien," said he in his quiet voice, "that you had best stay where you are."

Lesage looked at him with amazement gradually replacing terror upon his pallid features.

"But you do not understand, Charles," he cried.

"Oh, yes, I think I do," said the other, smiling.

"They may be here in a few minutes. The hound has slipped its leash, you see, and has left them behind in the marsh; but they are sure to come here, for there is no other cottage but this."

"They are sure to come here."

"Well, then, let us fly. In the darkness we may yet escape."

"No; we shall stay where we are."

"Madman, you may sacrifice your own life, but not mine. Stay if you wish, but for my part I am going."

He ran towards the door with a foolish, helpless flapping of his hands, but the other sprang in front of him with so determined a gesture of authority that the younger man staggered back from it as from a blow.

"You fool!" said his companion. "You poor miserable dupe!"

Lesage's mouth opened, and he stood staring with his knees bent and his spread-fingered hands up, the most hideous picture of fear that I have ever seen.

"You, Charles, you!" he stammered, hawking up each word.

"Yes, me," said the other, smiling grimly.

"A police agent all the time! You who were the very soul of our society! You who were in our inmost council! You who led us on! Oh, Charles, you have not the heart! I think I hear them coming, Charles. Let me pass; I beg and implore you to let me pass."

The granite face shook slowly from side to side.

"But why me? Why not Toussac?"

"If the dog had crippled Toussac, why then I might have had you both. But friend Toussac is rather vigorous for a thin little fellow like me. No, no, my good Lucien, you are destined to be the trophy of my bow and my spear, and you must reconcile yourself to the fact."

Lesage slapped his forehead as if to assure himself that he was not dreaming.

"A police agent!" he repeated, "Charles a police agent!"

"I thought it would surprise you."

"But you were the most republican of us all. We were none of us advanced enough for you. How often have we gathered round you, Charles, to listen to your philosophy! And there is Sibylle, too! Don't tell me that Sibylle was a police spy also. But you are joking, Charles. Say that you are joking!"

The man relaxed his grim features, and his eyes puckered with amusement.

"Your astonishment is very flattering," said he. "I confess that I thought that I played my part rather cleverly. It is not my fault that these bunglers unleashed their hound, but at least I shall have the credit of having made a single-handed capture of one very desperate and dangerous conspirator." He smiled drily at this description of his prisoner. "The Emperor knows how to

reward his friends," he added, " and also how to punish his enemies."

All this time he had held his hand in his bosom, and now he drew it out so far as to show the brass gleam of a pistol butt.

" It is no use," said he, in answer to some look in the other's eye. " You stay in the hut, alive or dead."

Lesage put his hands to his face and began to cry with loud, helpless sobbings.

" Why, you have been worse than any of us, Charles," he moaned. " It was you who told Toussac to kill the man from Bow Street, and it was you also who set fire to the house in the Rue Basse de la Rampart. And now you turn on us ! "

" I did that because I wished to be the one to throw light upon it all—and at the proper moment."

" That is very fine, Charles, but what will be thought about that when I make it all public in my own defence ? How can you explain all that to your Emperor ? There is still time to prevent my telling all that I know about you."

" Well, really, I think that you are right, my friend," said the other, drawing out his pistol and cocking it. " Perhaps I *did* go a little beyond my instructions in one or two points, and, as you very properly remark, there is still time to set it right. It is a matter of detail whether I give you up living or give you up dead, and I think that, on the whole, it had better be dead."

It had been horrible to see Toussac tear the throat out of the hound, but it had not made my flesh creep as it crept now. Pity was mingled with my disgust for this unfortunate young man, who had been fitted by Nature for the life of a retired student or of a dreaming poet, but who had been dragged by stronger wills than his own into a part which no child could be more incapable of playing. I forgave him the trick by which he had caught me and the selfish fears to which he had been willing to sacrifice me. He had flung himself down upon the ground, and

floundered about in a convulsion of terror, whilst his terrible little companion, with his cynical smile, stood over him with his pistol in his hand. He played with the helpless panting coward as a cat might with a mouse; but I read in his inexorable eyes that it was no jest, and his finger seemed to be already tightening upon his trigger. Full of horror at so cold-blooded a murder, I pushed open my crazy cupboard, and had rushed out to plead for the victim, when there came a buzz of voices and a clanking of steel from without. With a stentorian shout of "In the name of the Emperor!" a single violent wrench tore the door of the hut from its hinges.

It was still blowing hard, and through the open doorway I could see a thick cluster of mounted men, with plumes slanted and mantles flapping, the rain shining upon their shoulders. At the side the light from the hut struck upon the heads of two beautiful horses, and upon the heavy red-toupeed busbies of the hussars who stood at their heads. In the doorway stood another hussar—a man of high rank, as could be seen from the richness of his dress and the distinction of his bearing. He was booted to the knees, with a uniform of light blue and silver, which his tall, slim, light-cavalry figure suited to a marvel. I could not but admire the way in which he carried himself, for he never deigned to draw the sword which shone at his side, but he stood in the doorway glancing round the blood-bespattered hut, and staring at its occupants with a very cool and alert expression. He had a handsome face, pale and clear-cut, with a bristling moustache, which cut across the brass chin-chain of his busby.

"Well," said he, "well?"

The older man had put his pistol back into the breast of his brown coat.

"This is Lucien Lesage," said he.

The hussar looked with disgust at the prostrate figure upon the floor.

"A pretty conspirator!" said he. "Get up, you

grovelling hound! Here, Gérard, take charge of him and bring him into camp."

A younger officer with two troopers at his heels came clanking into the hut, and the wretched creature, half swooning, was dragged out into the darkness.

"Where is the other—the man called Toussac?"

"He killed the hound and escaped. Lesage would have got away also had I not prevented him. If you had kept the dog in leash we should have had them both, but as it is, Colonel Lasalle, I think that you may congratulate me." He held out his hand as he spoke, but the other turned abruptly on his heel.

"You hear that, General Savary?" said he, looking out of the door. "Toussac has escaped."

A tall, dark young man appeared within the circle of light cast by the lamp. The agitation of his handsome swarthy face showed the effect which the news had upon him.

"Where is he, then?"

"It is a quarter of an hour since he got away."

"But he is the only dangerous man of them all. The Emperor will be furious. In which direction did he fly?"

"It must have been inland."

"But who is this?" asked General Savary, pointing at me. "I understood from your information that there were only two besides yourself, Monsieur——"

"I had rather no names were mentioned," said the other abruptly.

"I can well understand that," General Savary answered with a sneer.

"I would have told you that the cottage was the rendezvous, but it was not decided upon until the last moment. I gave you the means of tracking Toussac, but you let the hound slip. I certainly think that you will have to answer to the Emperor for the way in which you have managed the business."

"That, sir, is our affair," said General Savary sternly. "In the meantime you have not told us who this person is."

It seemed useless for me to conceal my identity, since I had a letter in my pocket which would reveal it.

" My name is Louis de Laval," said I proudly.

I may confess that I think we had exaggerated our own importance over in England. We had thought that all France was wondering whether we should return, whereas in the quick march of events France had really almost forgotten our existence. This young General Savary was not in the least impressed by my aristocratic name, but he jotted it down in his notebook.

" Monsieur de Laval has nothing whatever to do with the matter," said the spy. " He has blundered into it entirely by chance, and I will answer for his safe keeping in case he should be wanted."

" He will certainly be wanted," said General Savary. " In the meantime I need every trooper that I have for the chase, so, if you make yourself personally responsible, and bring him to the camp when needed, I see no objection to his remaining in your keeping. I shall send to you if I require him."

" He will be at the Emperor's orders."

" Are there any papers in the cottage ? "

" They have been burned."

" That is unfortunate."

" But I have duplicates."

" Excellent ! Come, Lasalle, every minute counts, and there is nothing to be done here. Let the men scatter, and we may still ride him down."

The two tall soldiers clanked out of the cottage without taking any further notice of my companion, and I heard the sharp stern order and the jingling of metal as the troopers sprang back into their saddles once more. An instant later they were off, and I listened to the dull beat of their hoofs dying rapidly into a confused murmur. My little snuff-coloured champion went to the door of the hut and peered after them through the darkness. Then he came back and looked me up and down, with his usual dry sardonic smile.

"Well, young man," said he, "we have played some pretty *tableaux vivants* for your amusement, and you can thank me for that nice seat in the front row of the parterre."

"I am under a very deep obligation to you, sir," I answered, struggling between my gratitude and my aversion. "I hardly know how to thank you."

He looked at me with a singular expression in his ironical eyes.

"You will have the opportunity for thanking me later," said he. "In the meantime, as you say that you are a stranger upon our coast, and as I am responsible for your safe keeping, you cannot do better than follow me, and I will take you to a place where you may sleep in safety."

6. *The Secret Passage*

THE fire had already smouldered down, and my companion blew out the lamp, so that we had not taken ten paces before we had lost sight of the ill-omened cottage, in which I had received so singular a welcome upon my home-coming. The wind had softened down, but a fine rain, cold and clammy, came drifting up from the sea. Had I been left to myself I should have found myself as much at a loss as I had been when I first landed; but my companion walked with a brisk and assured step, so that it was evident that he guided himself by landmarks which were invisible to me. For my part, wet and miserable, with my forlorn bundle under my arm, and my nerves all jangled by my terrible experiences, I trudged in silence by his side, turning over in my mind all that had occurred to me.

Young as I was, I had heard much political discussion amongst my elders in England, and the state of affairs in France was perfectly familiar to me. I was aware that the recent elevation of Buonaparte to the throne had enraged the small but formidable section of Jacobins and extreme Republicans, who saw that all their efforts

to abolish a kingdom had only ended in transforming it into an empire. It was, indeed a pitiable result of their frenzied strivings that a crown with eight *fleurs-de-lis* should be changed into a higher crown surmounted by a cross and ball. On the other hand, the followers of the Bourbons, in whose company I had spent my youth, were equally disappointed at the manner in which the mass of the French people hailed this final step in the return from chaos to order. Contradictory as were their motives, the more violent spirits of both parties were united in their hatred to Napoleon, and in their fierce determination to get rid of him by any means. Hence a series of conspiracies, most of them with their base in England; and hence also a large use of spies and informers upon the part of Fouché and of Savary, upon whom the responsibility of the safety of the Emperor lay. A strange chance had landed me upon the French coast at the very same time as a murderous conspirator, and had afterwards enabled me to see the weapons with which the police contrived to thwart and outwit him and his associates. When I looked back upon my series of adventures, my wanderings in the salt-marsh, my entrance into the cottage, my discovery of the papers, my capture by the conspirators, the long period of suspense with Toussac's dreadful thumb upon my chin, and finally the moving scenes which I had witnessed—the killing of the hound, the capture of Lesage, and the arrival of the soldiers—I could not wonder that my nerves were overwrought, and that I surprised myself in little convulsive gestures, like those of a frightened child.

The chief thought which now filled my mind was what my relations were with this dangerous man who walked by my side. His conduct and bearing had filled me with abhorrence. I had seen the depth of cunning with which he had duped and betrayed his companions, and I had read in his lean smiling face the cold deliberate cruelty of his nature, as he stood, pistol in hand, over the whimpering coward whom he had outwitted. Yet I could not

deny that when, through my own foolish curiosity, I had placed myself in a most hopeless position, it was he who had braved the wrath of the formidable Toussac in order to extricate me. It was evident also that he might have made his achievement more striking by delivering up two prisoners instead of one to the troopers. It is true that I was not a conspirator, but I might have found it difficult to prove it. So inconsistent did such conduct seem in this little yellow flintstone of a man that, after walking a mile or two in silence, I asked him suddenly what the meaning of it might be.

I heard a dry chuckle in the darkness, as if he were amused by the abruptness and directness of my question.

"You are a most amusing person, Monsieur—Monsieur—let me see, what did you say your name was?"

"De Laval."

"Ah, quite so, Monsieur de Laval. You have the impetuosity and the ingenuousness of youth. You want to know what is up a chimney, you jump up the chimney. You want to know the reason of a thing, and you blurt out a question. I have been in the habit of living among people who keep their thoughts to themselves, and I find you very refreshing."

"Whatever the motives of your conduct, there is no doubt that you saved my life," said I. "I am much obliged to you for your intercession." It is the most difficult thing in the world to express gratitude to a person who fills you with abhorrence, and I fear that my halting speech was another instance of that ingenuousness of which he accused me.

"I can do without your thanks," said he coldly. "You are perfectly right when you think that if it had suited my purpose I should have let you perish, and I am perfectly right when I think that if it were not that you are under an obligation you would fail to see my hand if I stretched it out to you just as that overgrown puppy Lasalle did. It is very honourable, he thinks, to

serve the Emperor upon the field of battle, and to risk life in his behalf, but when it comes to living amidst danger as I have done, consorting with desperate men, and knowing well that the least slip would mean death, why, then one is beneath the notice of a fine clean-handed gentleman. Why," he continued in a burst of bitter passion, " I have dared more, and endured more, with Toussac and a few of his kidney for comrades, than this Lasalle has done in all the childish cavalry charges that ever he undertook. As to service, all his Marshals put together have not rendered the Emperor as pressing a service as I have done. But I daresay it does not strike you in that light, Monsieur—Monsieur——"

" De Laval."

" Quite so—it is curious how that name escapes me. I daresay you take the same view as Colonel Lasalle ? "

" It is not a question upon which I can offer an opinion," said I. " I only know that I owe my life to your intercession."

I do not know what reply he might have made to this evasion, but at that moment we heard a couple of pistol shots and a distant shouting from far away in the darkness. We stopped for a few minutes, but all was silent once more.

" They must have caught sight of Toussac," said my companion. " I am afraid that he is too strong and too cunning to be taken by them. I do not know what impression he left upon you, but I can tell you that you will go far to meet a more dangerous man."

I answered that I would go far to avoid meeting one, unless I had the means of defending myself, and my companion's dry chuckle showed that he appreciated my feelings.

" Yet he is an absolutely honest man, which is no very common thing in these days," said he. " He is one of those who, at the outbreak of the Revolution, embraced it with the whole strength of his simple nature. He believed what the writers and the speakers told him, and

he was convinced that, after a little disturbance and a few necessary executions, France was to become a heaven upon earth, the centre of peace and comfort and brotherly love. A good many people got those fine ideas into their heads, but the heads have mostly dropped into the sawdust basket by this time. Toussac was true to them, and when instead of peace he found war, instead of comfort a grinding poverty, and instead of equality an Empire, it drove him mad. He became the fierce creature you see, with the one idea of devoting his huge body and giant's strength to the destruction of those who had interfered with his ideal. He is fearless, persevering and implacable. I have no doubt at all that he will kill me for the part that I have played to-night."

It was in the calmest voice that my companion uttered the remark, and it made me understand that it was no boast when he said there was more courage needed to carry on his unsavoury trade than to play the part of a *beau sabreur* like Lasalle. He paused a little, and then went on as if speaking to himself.

"Yes," said he, "I missed my chance. I certainly ought to have shot him when he was struggling with the hound. But if I had only wounded him he would have torn me into bits like an over-boiled pullet, so perhaps it as as well as it is."

We had left the salt-marsh behind us, and for some time I had felt the soft springy turf of the downland beneath my feet, and our path had risen and dipped over the curves of the low coast hills. In spite of the darkness my companion walked with great assurance, never hesitating for an instant, and keeping up a stiff pace which was welcome to me in my sodden and benumbed condition. I had been so young when I left my native place that it is doubtful whether, even in daylight, I should have recognised the country-side, but now in the darkness, half stupefied by my adventures, I could not form the least idea as to where we were or what we were making for. A certain recklessness had taken possession of me,

and I cared little where I went as long as I could gain the rest and shelter of which I stood in need.

I do not know how long we had walked ; I only know that I had dozed and woke and dozed again whilst still automatically keeping pace with my comrade, when I was at last aroused by his coming to a dead stop. The rain had ceased, and although the moon was still obscured, the heavens had cleared somewhat, and I could see for a little distance in every direction. A huge white basin gaped in front of us, and I made out that it was a deserted chalk quarry, with brambles and ferns growing thickly all round the edges. My companion, after a stealthy glance round to make sure that no one was observing us, picked his way amongst the scattered clumps of bushes until he reached the wall of chalk. This he skirted for some distance, squeezing between the cliff and the brambles until he came at last to a spot where all further progress appeared to be impossible.

"Can you see a light behind us?" asked my companion.

I turned round and looked carefully in every direction, but was unable to see one.

"Never mind," said he. "You go first, and I will follow."

In some way during the instant that my back had been turned he had swung aside or plucked out the tangle of bush which had barred our way. When I turned there was a square dark opening in the white glimmering wall in front of us.

"It is small at the entrance, but it grows larger further in," said he.

I hesitated for an instant. Whither was it that this strange man was leading me? Did he live in a cave like a wild beast, or was this some trap into which he was luring me? The moon shone out at the instant, and in its silver light this black, silent porthole looked inexpressibly cheerless and menacing.

"You have gone rather far to turn back, my good

friend," said my companion. "You must either trust me altogether or not trust me at all."

"I am at your disposal."

"Pass in, then, and I shall follow."

I crept into the narrow passage, which was so low that I had to crawl down it upon my hands and knees. Craning my neck round, I could see the black angular silhouette of my companion as he came after me. He paused at the entrance, and then, with a rustling of branches and snapping of twigs, the faint light was suddenly shut off from outside, and we were left in pitchy darkness. I heard the scraping of his knees as he crawled up behind me.

"Go on until you come to a step down," said he. "We shall have more room there, and we can strike a light."

The ceiling was so low that by arching my back I could easily strike it, and my elbows touched the wall upon either side. In those days I was slim and lithe, however, so that I found no difficulty in making my way onwards until, at the end of a hundred paces, or it may have been a hundred and fifty, I felt with my hands that there was a dip in front of me. Down this I clambered, and was instantly conscious from the purer air that I was in some larger cavity. I heard the snapping of my companion's flint, and the red glow of the tinder paper leaped suddenly into the clear yellow flame of the taper. At first I could only see that stern, emaciated face, like some grotesque carving in walnut wood, with the ceaseless fishlike vibration of the muscles of his jaw. The light beat full upon it, and it stood strangely out with a dim halo round it in the darkness. Then he raised the taper and swept it slowly round at arm's length so as to illuminate the place in which we stood.

I found that we were in a subterranean tunnel, which appeared to extend into the bowels of the earth. It was so high that I could stand erect with ease, and the old lichen-blotched stones which lined the walls told of its great age. At the spot where we stood the ceiling had

fallen in and the original passage been blocked, but a cutting had been made from this point through the chalk to form the narrow burrow along which we had come. This cutting appeared to be quite recent, for a mound of *débris* and some trenching tools were still lying in the passage. My companion, taper in hand, started off down the tunnel, and I followed at his heels, stepping over the great stones which had fallen from the roof or the walls, and now obstructed the path.

"Well," said he, grinning at me over his shoulder, "have you ever seen anything like this in England?"

"Never," I answered.

"These are the precautions and devices which men adopted in rough days long ago. Now that rough days have come again, they are very useful to those who know of such places."

"Whither does it lead, then?" I asked.

"To this," said he, stopping before an old wooden door, powerfully clamped with iron. He fumbled with the metal-work, keeping himself between me and it, so that I could not see what he was doing. There was a sharp snick, and the door revolved slowly upon its hinges. Within there was a steep flight of time-worn steps leading upwards. He motioned me on, and closed the door behind us. At the head of the stair there was a second wooden gate, which he opened in a similar manner.

I had been dazed before ever I came into the chalk pit, but now, at this succession of incidents, I began to rub my eyes and ask myself whether this was young Louis de Laval, late of Ashford, in Kent, or whether it was some dream of the adventures of a hero of Pigault Lebrun. These massive moss-grown arches and mighty iron-clamped doors were, indeed, like the dim shadowy background of a vision; but the guttering taper, my sodden bundle, and all the sordid details of my disarranged toilet assured me only too clearly of their reality. Above all, the swift, brisk, business-like manner of my companion, and his occasional abrupt remarks, brought my fancies

back to the ground once more. He held the door open for me now, and closed it again when I had passed through.

We found ourselves in a long vaulted corridor,-with a stone-flagged floor, and a dim oil lamp burning at the further end. Two iron-barred windows showed that we had come above the earth's surface once more. Down this corridor we passed, and then through several passages and up a short winding stair. At the head of it was an open door, which led into a small but comfortable bedroom.

"I presume that this will satisfy your wants for to-night," said he.

I asked for nothing better than to throw myself down, damp clothes and all, upon that snowy coverlet; but for the instant my curiosity overcame my fatigue.

"I am much indebted to you, sir," said I. "Perhaps you will add to your favours by letting me know where I am."

"You are in my house, and that must suffice you for to-night. In the morning we shall go farther into the matter." He rang a small bell, and a gaunt shock-headed country man-servant came running at the call.

"Your mistress has retired, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, a good two hours ago."

"Very good. I shall call you myself in the morning." He closed my door, and the echo of his steps seemed hardly to have died from my ears before I had sunk into that deep and dreamless sleep which only youth and fatigue can give.

7. *The Owner of Grosbois*

MY host was as good as his word, for, when a noise in my room awoke me in the morning, it was to find him standing by the side of my bed, so composed in his features and so drab in his attire, that it was hard to associate him with the stirring scenes of yesterday and with the repulsive part which he had played in them.

Now in the fresh morning sunlight he presented rather the appearance of a pedantic schoolmaster, an impression which was increased by the masterful and yet benevolent smile with which he regarded me. In spite of his smile, I was more conscious than ever that my whole soul shrank from him, and that I should not be at my ease until I had broken this companionship which had been so involuntarily formed. He carried a heap of clothes over one arm, which he threw upon a chair at the bottom of my bed.

"I gather from the little that you told me last night," said he, "that your wardrobe is at present somewhat scanty. I fear that your inches are greater than those of anyone in my household, but I have brought a few things here amongst which you may find something to fit you. Here, too, are the razors, the soap and the powder-box. I will return in half an hour, when your toilet will doubtless be completed."

I found that my own clothes, with a little brushing, were as good as ever, but I availed myself of his offer to the extent of a ruffled shirt and a black satin cravat. I had finished dressing and was looking out of the window of my room, which opened on to a blank wall, when my host returned: He looked me all over with a keenly scrutinising eye, and appeared to be satisfied with what he saw.

"That will do! That will do very well indeed!" said he, nodding a critical head. "In these times a slight indication of travel or hard work upon a costume is more fashionable than the foppishness of the Incroyable. I have heard ladies remark that it was in better taste. Now, sir, if you will kindly follow me."

His solicitude about my dress filled me with surprise, but this was soon forgotten in the shock which was awaiting me. For as we passed down the passage and into a large hall which seemed strangely familiar to me, there was a full-length portrait of my father standing right in front of me. I stood staring with a gasp of astonish-

ment, and turned to see the cold grey eyes of my companion fixed upon me with a humorous glitter.

"You seem surprised, Monsieur de Laval," said he.

"For God's sake," said I, "do not trifle with me any further! Who are you, and what is this place to which you have taken me?"

For answer he broke into one of his dry chuckles, and, laying his skinny brown hand upon my wrist, he led me into a large apartment. In the centre was a table, tastefully laid, and beyond it in a low chair a young lady was seated, with a book in her hand. She rose as we entered, and I saw that she was tall and slender, with a dark face, pronounced features, and black eyes of extraordinary brilliancy. Even in that one glance it struck me that the expression with which she regarded me was by no means a friendly one.

"Sibylle," said my host, and his words took the breath from my lips, "this is your cousin from England, Louis de Laval. This, my dear nephew, is my only daughter, Sibylle Bernac."

"Then you——"

"I am your mother's brother, Charles Bernac."

"You are my Uncle Bernac!" I stammered at him like an idiot. "But why did you not tell me so?" I cried.

"I was not sorry to have a chance of quietly observing what his English education had done for my nephew. It might also have been harder for me to stand your friend if my comrades had any reason to think that I was personally interested in you. But you will permit me now to welcome you heartily to France, and to express my regret if your reception has been a rough one. I am sure that Sibylle will help me to atone for it." He smiled archly at his daughter, who continued to regard me with a stony face.

I looked round me, and gradually the spacious room, with the weapons upon the wall, and the deer's heads, came dimly back to my memory. That view through

the oriel window, too, with the clump of oaks in the sloping park, and the sea in the distance beyond, I had certainly seen it before. It was true then, and I was in our own castle of Grosbois, and this dreadful man in the snuff-coloured coat, this sinister plotter with the death's-head face, was the man whom I had heard my poor father curse so often, the man who had ousted him from his own property and installed himself in his place. And yet I could not forget that it was he also who, at some risk to himself, had saved me the night before, and my soul was again torn between my gratitude and my repulsion.

We had seated ourselves at the table, and as we ate, this newly-found uncle of mine continued to explain all those points which I had failed to understand.

"I suspected that it was you the instant that I set eyes upon you," said he. "I am old enough to remember your father when he was a young gallant, and you are his very double—though I may say, without flattery, that where there is a difference it is in your favour. And yet he had the name of being one of the handsomest men betwixt Rouen and the sea. You must bear in mind that I was expecting you, and that there are not so many young aristocrats of your age wandering about along the coast. I was surprised when you did not recognise where you were last night. Had you never heard of the secret passage of Grosbois?"

It came vaguely back to me that in my childhood I had heard of this underground tunnel, but that the roof had fallen in and rendered it useless.

"Precisely," said my uncle. "When the castle passed into my hands, one of the very first things which I did was to cut a new opening at the end of it, for I foresaw that in these troublesome times it might be of use to me; indeed, had it been in repair it might have made the escape of your mother and father a very much easier affair."

His words recalled all that I had heard and all that I could remember of those dreadful days when we, the

Lords of the country-side, had been chased across it as if we had been wolves, with the howling mob still clustering at the pier-head to shake their fists and hurl their stones at us. I remembered, too, that it was this very man who was speaking to me who had thrown oil upon the flames in those days, and whose fortunes had been founded upon our ruin. As I looked across at him I found that his keen grey eyes were fixed upon me, and I could see that he had read the thoughts in my mind.

"We must let bygones be bygones," said he. "Those are quarrels of the last generation, and Sibylle and you represent a new one."

My cousin had not said one word or taken any notice of my presence, but at this joining of our names she glanced at me with the same hostile expression which I had already remarked.

"Come, Sibylle," said her father, "you can assure your cousin Louis that, so far as you are concerned, any family misunderstanding is at an end."

"It is very well for us to talk in that way, father," she answered. "It is not your picture that hangs in the hall, or your coat-of-arms that I see upon the wall. We hold the castle and the land, but it is for the heir of the de Lavals to tell *us* if he is satisfied with this." Her dark scornful eyes were fixed upon me as she waited for my reply, but her father hastened to intervene.

"This is not a very hospitable tone in which to greet your cousin," said he harshly. "It has so chanced that Louis' heritage has fallen to us, but it is not for us to remind him of the fact."

"He needs no reminding," said she.

"You do me an injustice," I cried, for the evident and malignant scorn of this girl galled me to the quick. "It is true that I cannot forget that this castle and these grounds belonged to my ancestors—I should be a clod indeed if I *could* forget it—but if you think that I harbour any bitterness, you are mistaken. For my own part, I

ask nothing better than to open up a career for myself with my own sword."

" And never was there a time when it could be more easily and more brilliantly done," cried my uncle. " There are great things about to happen in the world, and if you are at the Emperor's court you will be in the middle of them. I understand that you are content to serve him ?

" I wish to serve my country."

" By serving the Emperor you do so, for without him the country becomes chaos."

" From all we hear it is not a very easy service," said my cousin. " I should have thought that you would have been very much more comfortable in England—and then you would have been so much safer also."

Everything which the girl said seemed to be meant as an insult to me, and yet I could not imagine how I had ever offended her. Never had I met a woman for whom I conceived so hearty and rapid a dislike. I could see that her remarks were as offensive to her father as they were to me, for he looked at her with eyes which were as angry as her own.

" Your cousin is a brave man, and that is more than can be said for someone else that I could mention," said he.

" For whom ? " she asked.

" Never mind ! " he snapped, and, jumping up with the air of a man who is afraid that his rage may master him, and that he may say more than he wished, he ran from the room.

She seemed startled by this retort of his, and rose as if she would follow him. Then she tossed her head and laughed incredulously.

" I suppose that you have never met your uncle before ? " said she, after a few minutes of embarrassed silence.

" Never," answered I.

" Well, what do you think of him now you *have* met him ? "

Such a question from a daughter about her father filled me with a certain vague horror. I felt that he must be even a worse man than I had taken him for if he had so completely forfeited the loyalty of his own nearest and dearest.

"Your silence is a sufficient answer," said she, as I hesitated for a reply. "I do not know how you came to meet him last night, or what passed between you, for we do not share each other's confidences. I think, however, that you have read him aright. Now I have something to ask you. You had a letter from him inviting you to leave England and to come here, had you not?"

"Yes, I had."

"Did you observe nothing on the outside?"

I thought of those two sinister words which had puzzled me so much.

"What! it was you who warned me not to come?"

"Yes, it was I. I had no other means of doing it."

"But why did you do it?"

"Because I did not wish you to come here."

"Did you think that I would harm you?"

She sat silent for a few seconds like one who is afraid of saying too much. When her answer came it was a very unexpected one:

"I was afraid that you would be harmed."

"You think that I am in danger here?"

"I am sure of it."

"You advise me to leave?"

"Without losing an instant."

"From whom is the danger, then?"

Again she hesitated, and then, with a reckless motion like one who throws prudence to the winds, she turned upon me.

"It is from my father," said she.

"But why should he harm me?"

"That is for your sagacity to discover."

"But I assure you, mademoiselle, that in this matter

you misjudge him," said I. "As it happens, he interfered to save my life last night."

"To save your life! From whom?"

"From two conspirators whose plans I had chanced to discover."

"Conspirators!" She looked at me in surprise.

"They would have killed me if he had not intervened."

"It is not his interest that you should be harmed yet awhile. He had reasons for wishing you to come to Castle Grosbois. But I have been very frank with you, and I wish you to be equally so with me. Does it happen—does it happen that during your youth in England you have ever—you have ever had an affair of the heart?"

Everything which this cousin of mine said appeared to me to be stranger than the last, and this question, coming at the end of so serious a conversation, was the strangest of all. But frankness begets frankness, and I did not hesitate.

"I have left the very best and truest girl in the world behind me in England," said I. "Eugénie is her name, Eugénie de Choiseul, the niece of the old Duke."

My reply seemed to give my cousin great satisfaction. Her large dark eyes shone with pleasure.

"You are very attached?" she asked.

"I shall never be happy until I see her."

"And you would not give her up?"

"God forbid!"

"Not for the Castle of Grosbois?"

"Not even for that."

My cousin held out her hand to me with a charmingly frank impulsiveness.

"You will forgive me for my rudeness," said she. "I see that we are to be allies and not enemies."

And our hands were still clasped when her father re-entered the room.

8. *Cousin Sibylle*

I COULD see in my uncle's grim face as he looked at us the keenest satisfaction contending with surprise at this sign of our sudden reconciliation. All trace of his recent anger seemed to have left him as he addressed his daughter, but in spite of his altered tone I noticed that her eyes looked defiance and distrust.

"I have some papers of importance to look over," said he. "For an hour or so I shall be engaged. I can guess that Louis would like to see the old place once again, and I am sure that he could not have a better guide than you, Sibylle, if you will take him over it."

She raised no objection, and for my part I was overjoyed at the proposal, as it gave me an opportunity of learning more of this singular cousin of mine, who had told me so much and yet seemed to know so much more. What was the meaning of this obscure warning which she had given me against her father, and why was she so frankly anxious to know about my love affairs? These were the two questions which pressed for an answer. So out we went together into the sweet coast-land air, the sweeter for the gale of the night before, and we walked through the old yew-lined paths, and out into the park, and so round the castle, looking up at the gables, the grey pinnacles, the oak-mullioned windows, the ancient wing with its crenulated walls and its meurtrière windows, the modern with its pleasant verandah and veil of honeysuckle. And as she showed me each fresh little detail, with a particularity which made me understand how dear the place had become to her, she would still keep offering her apologies for the fact that she should be the hostess and I the visitor.

"It is not against you but against ourselves that I was bitter," said she, "for are we not the cuckoos who have taken a strange nest and driven out those who built it? It makes me blush to think that my father should invite you to your own house."

"Perhaps we had been rooted here too long," I answered. "Perhaps it is for our own good that we are driven out to carve our own fortunes, as I intend to do."

"You say that you are going to the Emperor?"

"Yes."

"You know that he is in camp near here?"

"So I have heard."

"But your family is still proscribed?"

"I have done him no harm. I will go boldly to him and ask him to admit me into his service."

"Well," said she, "there are some who call him a usurper, and wish him all evil; but for my own part I have never heard of anything that he has said and done which was not great and noble. But I had expected that you would be quite an Englishman, Cousin Louis, and come over here with your pockets full of Pitt's guineas and your heart of treason."

"I have met nothing but hospitality from the English," I answered; "but my heart has always been French."

"But your father fought against us at Quiveron."

"Let each generation settle its own quarrels," said I. "I am quite of your father's opinion about that."

"Do not judge my father by his words, but by his deeds," said she, with a warning finger upraised; "and, above all, Cousin Louis, unless you wish to have my life upon your conscience, never let him suspect that I have said a word to set you on your guard."

"Your life!" I gasped.

"Oh, yes, he would not stick at that!" she cried. "He killed my mother. I do not say that he slaughtered her, but I mean that his cold brutality broke her gentle heart. Now perhaps you begin to understand why I can talk of him in this fashion."

As she spoke I could see the secret broodings of years, the bitter resentments crushed down in her silent soul, rising suddenly to flush her dark cheeks and to gleam in her splendid eyes. I realised at that moment that in

that tall slim figure there dwelt an unconquerable spirit.

"You must think that I speak very freely to you, since I have only known you a few hours, Cousin Louis," said she.

"To whom should you speak freely if not to your own relative?"

"It is true; and yet I never expected that I should be on such terms with you. I looked forward to your coming with dread and sorrow. No doubt I showed something of my feelings when my father brought you in."

"Indeed you did," I answered. "I feared that my presence was unwelcome to you."

"Most unwelcome, both for your own sake and for mine," said she. "For your sake because I suspected, as I have told you, that my father's intentions might be unfriendly. For mine——"

"Why for yours?" I asked in surprise, for she had stopped in embarrassment.

"You have told me that your heart is another's. I may tell you that my hand is also promised, and that my love has gone with it."

"May all happiness attend it!" said I. "But why should this make my coming unwelcome?"

"That thick English air has dimmed your wits, cousin," said he, shaking her stately head at me. "But I can speak freely now that I know that this plan would be as hateful to you as to me. You must know, then, that if my father could have married us he would have united all claims to the succession of Grosbois. Then, come what might—Bourbon or Buonaparte—nothing could shake his position."

I thought of the solicitude which he had shown over my toilet in the morning, his anxiety that I should make a favourable impression, his displeasure when she had been cold to me, and the smile upon his face when he had seen us hand in hand.

"I believe you are right!" I cried.

"Right! Of course I am right! Look at him watching us now."

We were walking on the edge of the dried moat, and as I looked up there, sure enough, was the little yellow face turned towards us in the angle of one of the windows. Seeing that I was watching him, he rose and waved his hand merrily.

"Now you know why he saved your life—since you say that he saved it," said she. "It would suit his plans best that you should marry his daughter, and so he wished you to live. But when once he understands that that is impossible, why then, my poor Cousin Louis, his only way of guarding against the return of the de Lavals must lie in ensuring that there are none to return."

It was those words of hers, coupled with that furtive yellow face still lurking at the window, which made me realise the imminence of my danger. No one in France had any reason to take an interest in me. If I were to pass away there was no one who could make inquiry—I was absolutely in his power. My memory told me what a ruthless and dangerous man it was with whom I had to deal.

"But," said I, "he must have known that your affections were already engaged."

"He did," she answered; "it was that which made me most uneasy of all. I was afraid for you and afraid for myself, but, most of all, I was afraid for Lucien. No man can stand in the way of his plans."

"Lucien!" The name was like a lightning flash upon a dark night. I had heard of the vagaries of a woman's love, but was it possible that this spirited woman loved that poor creature whom I had seen grovelling last night in a frenzy of fear? But now I remembered also where I had seen the name Sibylle. It was upon the fly-leaf of his book. "Lucien, from Sibylle," was the inscription. I recalled also that my uncle had said something to him about his aspirations.

"Lucien is hot-headed, and easily carried away," said she. "My father has seen a great deal of him lately. They sit for hours in his room, and Lucien will say nothing of what passes between them. I fear that there is something going forward which may lead to evil. Lucien is a student rather than a man of the world, but he has strong opinions about politics."

I was at my wit's ends what to do, whether to be silent, or to tell her of the terrible position in which her lover was placed; but, even as I hesitated, she, with the quick intuition of a woman, read the doubts which were in my mind.

"You know something of him," she cried. "I understood that he had gone to Paris. For God's sake tell me what you know about him!"

"His name is Lesage?"

"Yes, yes. Lucien Lesage."

"I have—I have seen him," I stammered.

"You have seen him! And you only arrived in France last night. Where did you see him? What has happened to him?" She gripped me by the wrist in her anxiety.

It was cruel to tell her, and yet it seemed more cruel still to keep silent. I looked round in my bewilderment, and there was my uncle himself coming along over the close-cropped green lawn. By his side, with a merry clashing of steel and jingling of spurs, there walked a handsome young hussar—the same to whom the charge of the prisoner had been committed upon the night before. Sibylle never hesitated for an instant, but, with a set face and blazing eyes, she swept towards them.

"Father," said she, "what have you done with Lucien?"

I saw his impassive face wince for a moment before the passionate hatred and contempt which he read in her eyes. "We will discuss this at some future time," said he.

"I will know here and now," she cried. "What have you done with Lucien?"

"Gentlemen," said he, turning to the young hussar and me, "I am sorry that we should intrude our little domestic differences upon your attention. You will, I am sure, make allowances, lieutenant, when I tell you that your prisoner of last night was a very dear friend of my daughter's. Such family considerations do not prevent me from doing my duty to the Emperor, but they make that duty more painful than it would otherwise be."

"You have my sympathy, mademoiselle," said the young hussar.

It was to him that my cousin had now turned.

"Do I understand that you took him prisoner?" she asked.

"It was unfortunately my duty."

"From you I will get the truth. Whither did you take him?"

"To the Emperor's camp."

"And why?"

"Ah, mademoiselle, it is not for me to go into politics. My duties are but to wield a sword, and sit a horse, and obey my orders. Both these gentlemen will be my witnesses that I received my instructions from Colonel Lasalle."

"But on what charge was he arrested?"

"Tut, tut, child, we have had enough of this!" said my uncle harshly. "If you insist upon knowing I will tell you once and for all, that Monsieur Lucien Lesage has been seized for being concerned in a plot against the life of the Emperor, and that it was my privilege to denounce the would-be assassin."

"To denounce him!" cried the girl. "I know that it was you who set him on, who encouraged him, who held him to it whenever he tried to draw back. Oh, you villain! you villain! What have I ever done, what sin of my ancestors am I expiating, that I should be compelled to call such a man Father?"

My uncle shrugged his shoulders as if to say that it was useless to argue with a woman's tantrums. The

hussar and I made as if we would stroll away, for it was embarrassing to stand listening to such words, but in her fury she called to us to stop and be witnesses against him. Never have I seen such a recklessness of passion as blazed in her dry wide-opened eyes.

"You have deceived others, but you have never deceived me," she cried. "I know you as your own conscience knows you. You may murder me, as you murdered my mother before me, but you can never frighten me into being your accomplice. You proclaimed yourself a Republican that you might creep into a house and estate which do not belong to you. And now you try to make a friend of Buonaparte by betraying your old associates, who still trust in you. And you have sent Lucien to his death! But I know your plans, and my Cousin Louis knows them also, and I can assure you that there is just as much chance of his agreeing to them as there is of my doing so. I'd rather lie in my grave than be the wife of any man but Lucien."

"If you had seen the pitiful poltroon that he proved himself you would not say so," said my uncle coolly. "You are not yourself at present, but when you return to your right mind you will be ashamed of having made this public exposure of your weakness. And now, lieutenant, you have something to say."

"My message was to you, Monsieur de Laval," said the young hussar, turning his back contemptuously upon my uncle. ."The Emperor has sent me to bring you to him at once at the camp at Boulogne."

My heart leapt at the thought of escaping from my uncle.

"I ask nothing better," I cried.

"A horse and an escort are waiting at the gates."

"I am ready to start at this instant."

"Nay, there can be no such very great hurry," said my uncle. "Surely you will wait for luncheon, Lieutenant Gerard."

"The Emperor's commissions, sir, are not carried

out in such a manner," said the young hussar sternly. "I have already wasted too much time. We must be upon our way in five minutes."

My uncle placed his hand upon my arm and led me slowly towards the gateway, through which my cousin Sibylle had already passed.

"There is one matter that I wish to speak to you about before you go. Since my time is so short you will forgive me if I introduce it without preamble. You have seen your cousin Sibylle, and though her behaviour this morning is such as to prejudice you against her, yet I can assure you that she is a very amiable girl. She spoke just now as if she had mentioned the plan which I had conceived to you. I confess to you that I cannot imagine anything more convenient than that we should unite in order to settle once for all every question as to which branch of the family shall hold the estates."

"Unfortunately," said I, "there are objections."

"And pray what are they?"

"The fact that my cousin's hand, as I have just learned, is promised to another."

"That need not hinder us," said he, with a sour smile; "I will undertake that he never claims the promise."

"I fear that I have the English idea of marriage, that it should go by love and not by convenience. But in any case your scheme is out of the question, for my own affections are pledged to a young lady in England."

He looked wickedly at me out of the corners of his grey eyes.

"Think well what you are doing, Louis," said he, in a sibilant whisper which was as menacing as a serpent's hiss. "You are deranging my plans, and that is not done with impunity."

"It is not a matter in which I have any choice."

He gripped me by the sleeve, and waved his hand round as Satan may have done when he showed the kingdoms and principalities. "Look at the park," he cried, "the

fields, the woods. Look at the old castle in which your fathers have lived for eight hundred years. You have but to say the word and it is all yours once more."

There flashed up into my memory the little red-brick house at Ashford, and Eugénie's sweet pale face looking over the laurel bushes which grew by the window.

" It is impossible ! " said I.

There must have been something in my manner which made him comprehend that it really was so, for his face darkened with anger, and his persuasion changed in an instant to menace.

" If I had known this they might have done what they wished with you last night," said he. " I would never have put out a finger to save you."

" I am glad to hear you say so," I answered, " for it makes it easier for me to say that I wish to go my own way, and to have nothing more to do with you. What you have just said frees me from the bond of gratitude which held me back."

" I have no doubt that you would like to have nothing more to do with me," he cried. " You will wish it more heartily still before you finish. Very well, sir, go your own way and I will go mine, and we shall see who comes out the best in the end."

A group of hussars were standing by their horses' heads in the gateway. In a few minutes I had packed my scanty possessions, and I was hastening with them down the corridor when a chill struck suddenly through my heart at the thought of my cousin Sibylle. How could I leave her alone with this grim companion in the old castle ? Had she not herself told me that her very life might be at stake ? I had stopped in my perplexity, and suddenly there was a patter of feet, and there she was running towards me.

" Good-bye, Cousin Louis," she cried, with out-stretched hands.

" I was thinking of you," said I ; " your father and I have had an explanation and a quarrel."

"Thank God!" she cried. "Your only chance was to get away from him. But beware, for he will do you an injury if he can!"

"He may do his worst; but how can I leave you here in his power?"

"Have no fears about me. He has more reason to avoid me than I him. But they are calling for you, Cousin Louis. Good-bye, and God be with you!"

9. *The Camp of Boulogne*

MY uncle was still standing at the castle gateway, the very picture of a usurper, with our own old coat-of-arms of the bend argent and the three blue martlets engraved upon the stones at either side of him. He gave me no sign of greeting as I mounted the large grey horse which was awaiting me, but he looked thoughtfully at me from under his down-drawn brows, and his jaw muscles still throbbed with that stealthy rhythmical movement. I read a cold and settled malice in his set yellow face and his stern eyes. For my own part I sprang readily enough into the saddle, for the man's presence had, from the first, been loathsome to me, and I was right glad to be able to turn my back upon him. And so, with a stern quick order from the lieutenant and a jingle and clatter from the troopers, we were off upon our journey. As I glanced back at the black keep of Grosbois, and at the sinister figure who stood looking after us from beside the gateway, I saw from over his head a white handkerchief gleam for an instant in a last greeting from one of the gloomy meurtrière windows, and again a chill ran through me as I thought of the fearless girl and of the hands in which we were leaving her.

But sorrow clears from the mind of youth like the tarnish of breath upon glass, and who could carry a heavy heart upon so lightfooted a horse and through so sweet an air? The white glimmering road wound over

the downs with the sea far upon the left, and between lay that great salt-marsh which had been the scene of our adventures. I could even see, as I fancied, a dull black spot in the distance to mark the position of that terrible cottage. Far away the little clusters of houses showed the positions of Etaples, Ambleterre and the other fishing villages, whilst I could see that the point which had seemed last night to glow like a half-forged red-hot sword-blade was now white as a snow-field with the camp of a great army. Far, far away, a little dim cloud upon the water stood for the land where I had spent my days—the pleasant, homely land which will always rank next to my own in my affections.

And now I turned my attention from the downs and the sea to the hussars who rode beside me, forming, as I could perceive, a guard rather than an escort. Save for the patrol last night, they were the first of the famous soldiers of Napoleon whom I had ever seen, and it was with admiration and curiosity that I looked upon men who had won a world-wide reputation for their discipline and their gallantry. Their appearance was by no means gorgeous, and their dress and equipment was much more modest than that of the East Kent Yeomanry, which rode every Saturday through Ashford ; but the stained tunics, the worn leathers, and the rough hardy horses gave them a very workmanlike appearance. They were small, light, brown-faced fellows, heavily whiskered and moustached, many of them wearing ear-rings in their ears. It surprised me that even the youngest and most boyish-looking of them should be so bristling with hair, until, upon a second look, I perceived that his whiskers were formed of lumps of black wax stuck on to the sides of his face. The tall young lieutenant noticed the astonishment with which I gazed at his boyish trooper.

" Yes, yes," said he, " they are artificial, sure enough ; but what can you expect from a lad of seventeen ? On the other hand, we cannot spoil the appearance of the regiment upon parade by having a girl's cheeks in the ranks."

"It melts terribly in this warm weather, lieutenant," said the hussar, joining in the conversation with the freedom which was one of the characteristics of Napoleon's troops.

"Well, well, Caspar, in a year or two you will dispense with them."

"Who knows? Perhaps he will have dispensed with his head also by that time," said a corporal in front, and they all laughed together in a manner which in England would have meant a court-martial. This seemed to me to be one of the survivals of the Revolution, that officer and private were left upon a very familiar footing, which was increased, no doubt, by the freedom with which the Emperor would chat with his old soldiers, and the liberties which he would allow them to take with him. It was no uncommon thing for a shower of chaff to come from the ranks directed at their own commanding officers, and I am sorry to say, also, that it was no very unusual thing for a shower of bullets to come also. Unpopular officers were continually assassinated by their own men; at the battle of Montebello it is well known that every officer, with the exception of one lieutenant belonging to the 24th demi-brigade, was shot down from behind. But this was a relic of the bad times, and, as the Emperor gained more complete control, a better feeling was established. The history of our army at that time proved, at any rate, that the highest efficiency could be maintained without the flogging which was still used in the Prussian and the English service, and it was shown, for the first time, that great bodies of men could be induced to act from a sense of duty and a love of country, without hope of reward or fear of punishment. When a French general could suffer his division to straggle as they would over the face of the country, with the certainty that they would concentrate upon the day of battle, he proved that he had soldiers who were worthy of his trust.

One thing had struck me as curious about these hussars —that they pronounced French with the utmost difficulty.

I remarked it to the lieutenant as he rode by my side, and I asked him from what foreign country his men were recruited, since I could perceive that they were not Frenchmen.

"My faith, you must not let them hear you say so," said he, "for they would answer you as like as not by a thrust from their sabres. We are the premier regiment of the French cavalry, the First Hussars of Berchény, and, though it is true that our men are all recruited in Alsace, and few of them can speak anything but German, they are as good Frenchmen as Kléber or Kellermann, who came from the same parts. Our men are all picked, and our officers," he added, pulling at his light moustache, "are the finest in the service."

The swaggering vanity of the fellow amused me, for he cocked his busby, swung the blue dolman which hung from his shoulder, sat his horse, and clattered his scabbard in a manner which told of his boyish delight and pride in himself and his regiment. As I looked at his lithe figure and his fearless bearing, I could quite imagine that he did himself no more than justice, while his frank smile and his merry blue eyes assured me that he would prove a good comrade. He had himself been taking observations of me, for he suddenly placed his hand upon my knee as we rode side by side.

"I trust that the Emperor is not displeased with you," said he, with a very grave face.

"I cannot think that he can be so," I answered, "for I have come from England to put my services at his disposal."

"When the report was presented last night, and he heard of your presence in that den of thieves, he was very anxious that you should be brought to him. Perhaps it is that he wishes you to be guide to us in England. No doubt you know your way all over the island."

The hussar's idea of an island seemed to be limited to the little patches which lie off the Norman or Breton

coast. I tried to explain to him that this was a great country, not much smaller than France.

"Well, well," said he, "we shall know all about it presently, for we are going to conquer it. They say in the camp that we shall probably enter London either next Wednesday evening or else on the Thursday morning. We are to have a week for plundering the town, and then one army corps is to take possession of Scotland and another of Ireland."

His serene confidence made me smile. "But how do you know you can do all this?" I asked.

"Oh!" said he, "the Emperor has arranged it."

"But they have an army, and they are well prepared. They are brave men and they will fight."

"There would be no use their doing that, for the Emperor is going over himself," said he; and in the simple answer I understood for the first time the absolute trust and confidence which these soldiers had in their leader. Their feeling for him was fanaticism, and its strength was religion, and never did Mahomet nerve the arms of his believers and strengthen them against pain and death more absolutely than this little grey-coated idol did to those who worshipped him. If he had chosen —and he was more than once upon the point of it—to assert that he was indeed above humanity he would have found millions to grant his claim. You who have heard of him as a stout gentleman in a straw hat, as he was in his later days, may find it hard to understand it, but if you had seen his mangled soldiers still with their dying breath crying out to him, and turning their livid faces towards him as he passed, you would have realised the hold which he had over the minds of men.

"You have been over there?" asked the lieutenant presently, jerking his thumb towards the distant cloud upon the water.

"Yes, I have spent my life there."

"But why did you stay there when there was such good fighting to be had in the French service?"

" My father was driven out of the country as an aristocrat. It was only after his death that I could offer my sword to the Emperor."

" You have missed a great deal, but I have no doubt that we shall still have plenty of fine wars. And you think that the English will offer us battle ? "

" I have no doubt of it."

" We feared that when they understood that it was the Emperor in person who had come they would throw down their arms. I have heard that there are some fine women over there."

" The women are beautiful."

He said nothing, but for some time he squared his shoulders and puffed out his chest, curling up the ends of his little yellow moustache.

" But they will escape in boats," he muttered at last ; and I could see that he had still that picture of a little island in his imagination. " If they could but see us they might remain. It has been said of the Hussars of Berchény that they can set a whole population running, the women towards us, the men away. We are, as you have no doubt observed, a very fine body of men, and the officers are the pick of the service, though the seniors are hardly up to the same standard as the rest of us."

With all his self-confidence, this officer did not seem to me to be more than my own age, so I asked him whether he had seen any service. His moustache bristled with indignation at my question, and he looked me up and down with a severe eye.

" I have had the good fortune to be present at nine battles, sir, and at more than forty skirmishes," said he. " I have also fought a considerable number of duels, and I can assure you that I am always ready to meet anyone—even a civilian—who may wish to put me to the proof."

I assured him that he was very fortunate to be so young and yet to have seen so much, upon which his ill-temper vanished as quickly as it came, and he explained that he had served in the Hohenlinden campaign under Moreau,

as well as in Napoleon's passage of the Alps, and the campaign of Marengo.

"When you have been with the army for a little time the name of Étienne Gerard will not be so unfamiliar to you," said he. "I believe that I may claim to be the hero of one or two little stories which the soldiers love to tell about their camp fires. You will hear of my duel with the six fencing masters, and you will be told how, single-handed, I charged the Austrian Hussars of Graz and brought their silver kettledrum back upon the crupper of my mare. I can assure you that it was not by accident that I was present last night, but it was because Colonel Lasalle was very anxious to be sure of any prisoners whom he might make. As it turned out, however, I only had the one poor chicken-hearted creature, whom I handed over to the provost-marshal."

"And the other—Toussac?"

"Ah, he seems to have been a man of another breed. I could have asked nothing better than to have had him at my sword-point. But he has escaped. They caught sight of him and fired a pistol or two, but he knew the bog too well, and they could not follow him."

"And what will be done to your prisoner?" I asked.

Lieutenant Gerard shrugged his shoulders.

"I am very sorry for Mademoiselle, your cousin," said he, "but a fine girl should not love such a man when there are so many gallant soldiers upon the country-side. I hear that the Emperor is weary of these endless plottings, and that an example will be made of him."

Whilst the young hussar and I had been talking we had been cantering down the broad white road, until we were now quite close to the camp, which we could see lying in its arrangement of regiments and brigades beneath us. Our approach lay over the high ground, so that we could see down into this canvas city, with its interminable lines of picketed horses, its parks of artillery, and its swarms of soldiers. In the centre was a clear space, with one very large tent and a cluster of low wooden houses in the

middle of it, with the tri-colour banner waving above them.

"That is the Emperor's quarters, and the smaller tent there is the headquarters of General Ney, who commands this corps. You understand that this is only one of several armies dotted along from Dunkirk in the north to this, which is the most southerly. The Emperor goes from one to the other, inspecting each in its turn, but this is the main body, and contains most of the picked troops, so that it is we who see most of him, especially now that the Empress and the Court have come to Pont de Briques. He is in there at the present moment," he added in a hushed voice, pointing to the great white tent in the centre.

The road into the camp ran through a considerable plain, which was covered by bodies of cavalry and infantry engaged upon their drill. We had heard so much in England about Napoleon's troops, and their feats had appeared so extraordinary, that my imagination had prepared me for men of very striking appearance. As a matter of fact, the ordinary infantry of the line, in their blue coats and white breeches and gaiters, were quite little fellows, and even their high brass-covered hats and red plumes could not make them very imposing.

In spite of their size, however, they were tough and wiry, and after their eighteen months in camp they were trained to the highest pitch of perfection. The ranks were full of veterans, and all the under-officers had seen much service, while the generals in command have never been equalled in ability, so that it was no mean foe which lay with its menacing eyes fixed upon the distant cliffs of England. If Pitt had not been able to place the first navy in the world between the two shores the history of Europe might be very different to-day.

Lieutenant Gerard, seeing the interest with which I gazed at the manœuvring troops, was good enough to satisfy my curiosity about such of them as approached the road along which we were journeying.

"Those fellows on the black horses with the great blue rugs upon their croups are the Cuirassiers," said he. "They are so heavy that they cannot raise more than a trot, so when they charge we manage that there shall be a brigade of chasseurs or hussars behind them to follow up the advantage."

"Who is the civilian who is inspecting them?" I asked.

"That is not a civilian, but it is General St. Cyr, who is one of those whom they called the Spartans of the Rhine. They were of opinion that simplicity of life and of dress were part of a good soldier, and so they would wear no uniform beyond a simple blue riding coat, such as you see. St. Cyr is an excellent officer, but he is not popular, for he seldom speaks to anyone, and he sometimes shuts himself up for days on end in his tent, where he plays upon his violin. I think myself that a soldier is none the worse because he enjoys a glass of good wine, or has a smart jacket and a few Brandenburgs across his chest. For my part I do both, and yet those who know me would tell you that it has not harmed my soldiering. You see this infantry upon the left?"

"The men with the yellow facings?"

"Precisely. Those are Oudinot's famous grenadiers. And the other grenadiers, with the red shoulder-knots and the fur hats strapped above their knapsacks, are the Imperial Guard, the successors of the old Consular Guard who won Marengo for us. Eighteen hundred of them got the cross of honour after the battle. There is the 57th of the line, which has been named 'The Terrible,' and there is the 7th Light Infantry, who come from the Pyrenees, and who are well known to be the best marchers and the greatest rascals in the army. The light cavalry in green are the Horse Chasseurs of the Guard, sometimes called the Guides, who are said to be the Emperor's favourite troops, although he makes a great mistake if he prefers them to the Hussars of Berchény. The other cavalry with the green pelisses are

also chasseurs, but I cannot tell from here what regiment they are. Their colonel handles them admirably. They are moving to a flank in open column of half-squadrons and then wheeling into line to charge. We could not do it better ourselves. And now, Monsieur de Laval, here we are at the gates of the Camp of Boulogne, and it is my duty to take you straight to the Emperor's quarters."

10. *The Ante-room*

THE camp of Boulogne contained at that time one hundred and fifty thousand infantry, with fifty thousand cavalry, so that its population was second only to Paris among the cities of France. It was divided into four sections, the right camp, the left camp, the camp of Wimereux, and the camp of Ambleteuse, the whole being about a mile in depth, and extending along the seashore for a length of about seven miles. On the land side it was open, but on the sea side it was fringed by powerful batteries containing mortars and cannon of a size never seen before. These batteries were placed along the edges of the high cliffs, and their lofty positions increased their range, and enabled them to drop their missiles upon the decks of the English ships.

It was a pretty sight to ride through the camp, for the men had been there for more than a year, and had done all that was possible to decorate and ornament their tents. Most of them had little gardens in front or around them, and the sun-burned fellows might be seen as we passed kneeling in their shirt-sleeves with their spuds and their watering-cans in the midst of their flower-beds. Others sat in the sunshine at the openings of the tents, tying up their queues, pipe-claying their belts, and polishing their arms, hardly bestowing a glance upon us as we passed, for patrols of cavalry were coming and going in every direction. The endless lines were formed into streets, with their names printed up upon boards. Thus we had

passed through the Rue d'Arcola, the Rue de Kléber, the Rue d'Égypte and the Rue d'Artillerie Volante, before we found ourselves in the great central square in which the headquarters of the army were situated.

The Emperor at this time used to sleep at a village called Pont de Briques, some four miles inland, but his days were spent at the camp, and his continual councils of war were held there. Here also were his ministers, and the generals of the army corps which were scattered up and down the coast came thither to make their reports and to receive their orders. For these consultations a plain wooden house had been constructed containing one very large room and three small ones. The pavilion which we had observed from the Downs served as an ante-chamber to the house, in which those who sought audience with the Emperor might assemble. It was at the door of this, where a strong guard of grenadiers announced Napoleon's presence, that my guardian sprang down from his horse and signed to me to follow his example. An officer of the guard took our names and returned to us accompanied by General Duroc, a thin, hard, dry man of forty, with a formal manner and a suspicious eye.

"Is this Monsieur Louis de Laval?" he asked, with a stiff smile.

I bowed.

"The Emperor is very anxious to see you. You are no longer needed, Lieutenant."

"I am personally responsible for bringing him safely, General."

"Very good. You may come in, if you prefer it!" And he passed us into the huge tent, which was unfurnished, save for a row of wooden benches round the sides. A number of men in naval and military uniforms were seated upon these, and numerous groups were standing about chatting in subdued tones. At the far end was a door which led into the Imperial council chamber. Now and then I saw some man in official

dress walk up to this door, scratch gently upon it with his nail, and then, as it instantly opened, slip discreetly through, closing it softly behind him. Over the whole assembly there hung an air of the Court rather than of the camp, an atmosphere of awe and of reverence which was the more impressive when it affected these bluff soldiers and sailors. The Emperor had seemed to me to be formidable in the distance, but I found him even more overwhelming now that he was close at hand.

"You need have no fears, Monsieur de Laval," said my companion. "You are going to have a good reception."

"How do you know that?"

"From General Duroc's manner. In these cursed Courts, if the Emperor smiles upon you everyone smiles, down to that flunkey in the red velvet coat yonder. But if the Emperor frowns, why, you have only to look at the face of the man who washes the Imperial plates, and you will see the frown reflected upon it. And the worst of it is that, if you are a plain-witted man, you may never find out what earned you either the frown or the smile. That is why I had rather wear the shoulder-straps of a lieutenant, and be at the side of my squadron, with a good horse between my knees and my sabre clanking against my stirrup-iron, than have Monsieur Talleyrand's grand hotel in the Rue Saint Florentin, and his hundred thousand livres of income."

I was still wondering whether the hussar could be right, and if the smile with which Duroc had greeted me could mean that the Emperor's intentions towards me were friendly, when a very tall and handsome young man, in a brilliant uniform, came towards me. In spite of the change in his dress, I recognised him at once as the General Savary who had commanded the expedition of the night before.

"Well, Monsieur de Laval," said he, shaking hands with me very pleasantly, "you have heard, no doubt, that this fellow Toussac has escaped us. He was really

the only one whom we were anxious to seize, for the other is evidently a mere dupe and dreamer. But we shall have him yet, and between ourselves we shall keep a very strict guard upon the Emperor's person until we do, for Master Toussac is not a man to be despised."

I seemed to feel his great rough thumb upon my chin as I answered that I thought he was a very dangerous man indeed.

"The Emperor will see you presently," said Savary. "He is very busy this morning, but he bade me say that you should have an audience." He smiled and passed on.

"Assuredly you are getting on," whispered Gérard. "There are a good many men here who would risk something to have Savary address them as he addressed you. The Emperor is certainly going to do something for you. But attention, friend, for here is Monsieur de Talleyrand himself coming towards us."

A singular-looking person was shuffling in our direction. He was a man about fifty years of age, largely made about the shoulders and chest, but stooping a good deal, and limping heavily in one leg. He walked slowly, leaning upon a silver-headed stick, and his sober suit of black, with silk stockings of the same hue, looked strangely staid among the brilliant uniforms which surrounded him. But in spite of his plain dress there was an expression of great authority upon his shrewd face, and everyone drew back with bows and salutes as he moved across the tent.

"Monsieur Louis de Laval?" said he, as he stopped in front of me, and his cold grey eyes played over me from head to heel.

I bowed, and with some coldness, for I shared the dislike which my father used to profess for this unfrocked priest and perjured politician; but his manner was so polished and engaging that it was hard to hold out against it.

"I knew your cousin de Rohan very well indeed,"

said he. "We were two rascals together when the world was not quite so serious as it is at present. I believe that you are related to the Cardinal de Montmorency de Laval, who is also an old friend of mine. I understand that you are about to offer your services to the Emperor?"

"I have come from England for that purpose, sir."

"And met with some little adventure immediately upon your arrival, as I understand. I have heard the story of the worthy police agent, the two Jacobins and the lonely hut. Well, you have seen the danger to which the Emperor is exposed, and it may make you the more zealous in his service. Where is your uncle, Monsieur Bernac?"

"He is at the castle of Grosbois."

"Do you know him well?"

"I had not seen him until yesterday."

"He is a very useful servant of the Emperor, but—but—" he inclined his head downwards to my ear, "some more congenial service will be found for you, Monsieur de Laval," and so, with a bow, he whisked round, and tapped his way across the tent again.

"Why, my friend, you are certainly destined for something great," said the hussar lieutenant. "Monsieur de Talleyrand does not waste his smiles and his bows, I promise you. He knows which way the wind blows before he flies his kite, and I foresee that I shall be asking for your interest to get me my captaincy in this English campaign. Ah, the council of war is at an end."

As he spoke the inner door at the end of the great tent opened, and a small knot of men came through dressed in the dark blue coats, with trimmings of gold oak-leaves, which marked the marshals of the Empire. They were, all but one, men who had hardly reached their middle age, and who, in any other army, might have been considered fortunate if they had gained the command of a regiment; but the continuous wars and the open system by which rules of seniority yielded to merit had opened up a rapid career to a successful soldier. Each carried

his curved cocked hat under his arm, and now, leaning upon their sword-hilts, they fell into a little circle and chatted eagerly among themselves.

"You are a man of family, are you not?" asked my hussar.

"I am of the same blood as the de Rohans and the Montmorencies."

"So I had understood. Well, then, you will understand that there have been some changes in this country when I tell you that those men who, under the Emperor, are the greatest in the country have been the one a waiter, the next a wine smuggler, the next a cooper of barrels and the next a house painter. Those are the trades which gave us Murat, Masséna, Ney and Lannes."

Aristocrat as I was, no names had ever thrilled me as those did, and I eagerly asked him to point me out each of these famous soldiers.

"Oh, there are many famous soldiers in the room," said he. "Besides," he added, twisting his moustache, "there may be junior officers here who have it in them to rise higher than any of them. But there is Ney to the right."

I saw a man with close-cropped red hair and a large square-jowled face, such as I have seen upon an English prize-fighter.

"We call him Peter the Red, and sometimes the Red Lion, in the army," said my companion. "He is said to be the bravest man in the army, though I cannot admit that he is braver than some other people whom I could mention. Still, he is undoubtedly a very good leader."

"And the general next him?" I asked. "Why does he carry his head all upon one side?"

"That is General Lannes, and he carries his head upon his left shoulder because he was shot through the neck at the siege of St. Jean d'Acre. He is a Gascon, like myself, and I fear that he gives some ground to those who accuse my countrymen of being a little talkative and quarrelsome. But monsieur smiles?"

"You are mistaken."

"I thought that perhaps something which I had said might have amused monsieur. I thought that possibly he meant that Gascons really were quarrelsome, instead of being, as I contend, the mildest race in France—an opinion which I am always ready to uphold in any way which may be suggested. But, as I say, Lannes is a very valiant man, though, occasionally, perhaps, a trifle hot-headed. The next man is Auguereau."

I looked with interest upon the hero of Castiglione, who had taken command upon the one occasion when Napoleon's heart and spirit had failed him. He was a man, I should judge, who would shine rather in war than in peace, for, with his long goat's face and his brandy nose, he looked, in spite of his golden oak-leaves, just such a long-legged, vulgar, swaggering, foul-mouthed old soldier as every barrack-room can show. He was an older man than the others, and his sudden promotion had come too late for him to change. He was always the Corporal of the Prussian Guard under the hat of the French Marshal.

"Yes, yes; he is a rough fellow," said Gerard, in answer to my remark. "He is one of those whom the Emperor had to warn that he wished them to be soldiers only with the army. He and Rapp and Lefebvre, with their big boots and their clanking sabres, were too much for the Empress's drawing-room at the Tuileries. There is Vandamme also, the dark man with the heavy face. Heaven help the English village that he finds his quarters in! It was he who got into trouble because he broke the jaw of a Westphalian priest who could not find him a second bottle of Tokay."

"And that is Murat, I suppose?"

"Yes; that is Murat with the black whiskers and the red, thick lips, and the brown of Egypt upon his face. He is the man for me! My word, when you have seen him raving in front of a brigade of light cavalry, with his plumes tossing and his sabre flashing, you would not

wish to see anything finer. I have known a square of grenadiers break and scatter at the very sight of him. In Egypt the Emperor kept away from him, for the Arabs would not look at the little General when this fine horseman and swordsman was before them. In my opinion Lasalle is the better light cavalry officer, but there is no one whom the men will follow as they do Murat."

"And who is the stern-looking man, leaning on the Oriental sword?"

"Oh, that is Soult! He is the most obstinate man in the world. He argues with the Emperor. The handsome man beside him is Junot, and Bernadotte is leaning against the tent-pole."

I looked with interest at the extraordinary face of this adventurer, who, after starting with a musket and a knapsack in the ranks, was not contented with the baton of a marshal, but passed on afterwards to grasp the sceptre of a king. And it might be said of him that, unlike his fellows, he gained his throne in spite of Napoleon rather than by his aid. Any man who looked at his singular pronounced features, the swarthiness of which proclaimed his half Spanish origin, must have read in his flashing black eyes and in that huge aggressive nose that he was reserved for a strange destiny. Of all the fierce and masterful men who surrounded the Emperor there was none with greater gifts, and none, also, whose ambitions he more distrusted, than those of Jules Bernadotte.

And yet, fierce and masterful as these men were, having, as Auguereau boasted, fear neither of God nor of the devil, there was something which thrilled or cowed them in the pale smile or black frown of the little man who ruled them. For, as I watched them, there suddenly came over the assembly a start and hush such as you see in a boys' school when the master enters unexpectedly, and there near the open doors of his headquarters stood the master himself. Even without that sudden silence, and the scramble to their feet of those upon the benches, I felt that I should have known instantly that he was

present. There was a pale luminosity about his ivory face which drew the eye towards it, and though his dress might be the plainest of a hundred, his appearance would be the first which one would notice. There he was, with his little plump, heavy-shouldered figure, his green coat with the red collar and cuffs, his white, well-formed legs, his sword with the gilt hilt and the tortoise-shell scabbard. His head was uncovered, showing his thin hair of a ruddy chestnut colour. Under one arm was the flat cocked hat with the twopenny tricolour rosette, which was already reproduced in his pictures. In his right hand he held a little riding switch with a metal head. He walked slowly forward, his face immutable, his eyes fixed steadily before him, measured, inexorable, the very personification of Destiny.

"Admiral Bruix!"

I do not know if that voice thrilled through everyone as it did through me. Never had I heard anything more harsh, more menacing, more sinister. From under his puckered brows his light-blue eyes glanced swiftly round with a sweep like a sabre.

"I am here, sire!" A dark, grizzled, middle-aged man, in a naval uniform, had advanced from the throng. Napoleon took three quick little steps towards him in so menacing a fashion, that I saw the weather-stained cheeks of the sailor turn a shade paler, and he gave a helpless glance round him, as if for assistance.

"How comes it, Admiral Bruix," cried the Emperor, in the same terrible rasping voice, "that you did not obey my commands last night?"

"I could see that a westerly gale was coming up, sire. I knew that——" he could hardly speak for his agitation, "I knew that if the ships went out with this lee shore——"

"What right have you to judge, sir?" cried the Emperor, in a cold fury of indignation. "Do you conceive that your judgment is to be placed against mine?"

"In matters of navigation, sire."

"In no matters whatsoever."

"But the tempest, sire! Did it not prove me to be in the right?"

"What! You still dare to bandy words with me?"

"When I have justice on my side."

There was a hush amidst all the great audience; such a heavy silence as comes only when many are waiting, and all with bated breath. The Emperor's face was terrible. His cheeks were of a greenish, livid tint, and there was a singular rotary movement of the muscles of his forehead. It was the countenance of an epileptic. He raised the whip to his shoulder, and took a step towards the admiral.

"You insolent rascal!" he hissed. It was the Italian word *coglione* which he used, and I observed that as his feelings overcame him his French became more and more that of a foreigner.

For a moment he seemed to be about to slash the sailor across the face with his whip. The latter took a step back, and clapped his hand to his sword.

"Have a care, sire," said he.

For a few instants the tension was terrible. Then Napoleon brought the whip down with a sharp crack against his own thigh.

"Vice-Admiral Magon," he cried, "you will in future receive all orders connected with the fleet. Admiral Bruix, you will leave Boulogne in twenty-four hours and withdraw to Holland. Where is Lieutenant Gerard, of the Hussars of Berchény?"

My companion's gauntlet sprang to his busby.

"I ordered you to bring Monsieur Louis de Laval from the castle of Grosbois."

"He is here, sire."

"Good! You may retire."

The lieutenant saluted, whisked round upon his heel, and clattered away, whilst the Emperor's blue eyes were turned upon me. I had often heard the phrase of eyes looking through you, but that piercing gaze did really give one the feeling that it penetrated to one's inmost

thoughts. But the sternness had all melted out of it, and I read a great gentleness and kindness in their expression.

"You have come to serve me, Monsieur de Laval?"

"Yes, sire."

"You have been some time in making up your mind."

"I was not my own master, sire."

"Your father was an aristocrat?"

"Yes, sire."

"And a supporter of the Bourbons?"

"Yes, sire."

"You will find that in France now there are no aristocrats and no Jacobins; but that we are all Frenchmen working for the glory of our country. Have you seen Louis de Bourbon?"

"I have seen him once, sire?"

"An insignificant-looking man, is he not?"

"No, sire, I thought him a fine-looking man."

For a moment I saw a hard gleam of resentment in those changing blue eyes. Then he put out his hand and pinched one of my ears.

"Monsieur de Laval was not born to be a courtier," said he. "Well, well, Louis de Bourbon will find that he cannot gain a throne by writing proclamations in London and signing them Louis. For my part, I found the crown of France lying upon the ground, and I lifted it upon my sword-point."

"You have lifted France with your sword also, sire," said Talleyrand, who stood at his elbow.

Napoleon looked at his famous minister, and I seemed to read suspicion in his eyes. Then he turned to his secretary.

"I leave Monsieur de Laval in your hands, De Meneval," said he. "I desire to see him in the council chamber after the inspection of the artillery."

II. *The Secretary*

EMPEROR, general and officials all streamed away to the review, leaving me with a gentle-looking, large-eyed man in a black suit with very white cambric ruffles, who introduced himself to me as Monsieur de Meneval, private secretary to His Majesty.

"We must get some food, Monsieur de Laval," said he. "It is always well, if you have anything to do with the Emperor, to get your food whenever you have the chance. It may be many hours before he takes a meal, and if you are in his presence you have to fast also. I assure you that I have nearly fainted from hunger and from thirst."

"But how does the Emperor manage himself?" I asked. This Monsieur de Meneval had such a kindly human appearance that I already felt much at my ease with him.

"Oh, he, he is a man of iron, Monsieur de Laval. We must not set our watches by his. I have known him work for eighteen hours on end and take nothing but a cup or two of coffee. He wears everybody out around him. Even the soldiers cannot keep up with him. I assure you that I look upon it as the very highest honour to have charge of his papers, but there are times when it is very trying all the same. Sometimes it is eleven o'clock at night, Monsieur de Laval, and I am writing to his dictation with my head aching for want of sleep. It is dreadful work, for he dictates as quickly as he can talk, and he never repeats anything. 'Now, Meneval,' says he suddenly, 'we shall stop here and have a good night's rest.' And then, just as I am congratulating myself, he adds, 'and we shall continue with the dictation at three to-morrow morning.' That is what he means by a good night's rest."

"But has he no hours for his meals, Monsieur de Meneval?" I asked, as I accompanied the unhappy secretary out of the tent.

"Oh, yes, he has hours, but he will not observe them. You see that it is already long after dinner time, but he has gone to this review. After the review something else will probably take up his attention, and then something else, until suddenly in the evening it will occur to him that he has had no dinner. 'My dinner, Constant, this instant!' he will cry, and poor Constant has to see that it is there."

"But it must be unfit to eat by that time," said I.

The secretary laughed in the discreet way of a man who has always been obliged to control his emotions.

"This is the Imperial kitchen," said he, indicating a large tent just outside the headquarters. "Here is Borel, the second cook, at the door. How many pullets to-day, Borel?"

"Ah, Monsieur de Meneval, it is heartrending," cried the cook. "Behold them!" and, drawing back the flap of the entrance, he showed us seven dishes, each of them containing a cold fowl. "The eighth is now on the fire and done to a turn, but I hear that His Majesty has started for the review, so we must put on a ninth."

"That is how it is managed," said my companion, as we turned from the tent. "I have known twenty-three fowls got ready for him before he asked for his meal. That day he called for his dinner at eleven at night. He cares little what he eats or drinks, but he will not be kept waiting. Half a bottle of Chambertin, a red mullet, or a pullet à la Marengo satisfy every need, but it is unwise to put pastry or cream upon the table, because he is as likely as not to eat it before the fowl. Ah, that is a curious sight, is it not?"

I had halted with an exclamation of astonishment. A groom was cantering a very beautiful Arab horse down one of the lanes between the tents. As it passed, a grenadier who was standing with a small pig under his arm hurled it down under the feet of the horse. The pig squealed vigorously and scuttled away, but the horse cantered on without changing its step.

"What does that mean?" I asked.

"That is Jardin, the head groom, breaking in a charger for the Emperor's use. They are first trained by having a cannon fired in their ears, then they are struck suddenly by heavy objects, and finally they have the test of the pig being thrown under their feet. The Emperor has not a very firm seat, and he very often loses himself in a reverie when he is riding, so it might not be very safe if the horse were not well trained. Do you see that young man asleep at the door of a tent?"

"Yes, I see him."

"You would not think that he is at the present moment serving the Emperor?"

"It seems a very easy service."

"I wish all our services were as easy, Monsieur de Laval. That is Joseph Linden, whose foot is the exact size of the Emperor's. He wears his new boots and shoes for three days before they are given to his master. You can see by the gold buckles that he has a pair on at the present moment. Ah, Monsieur de Caulaincourt, will you not join us at dinner in my tent?"

A tall, handsome man, very elegantly dressed, came across and greeted us. "It is rare to find you at rest, Monsieur de Meneval. I have no very light task myself as head of the household, but I think I have more leisure than you. Have we time for dinner before the Emperor returns?"

"Yes, yes; here is the tent, and everything ready. We can see when the Emperor returns, and be in the room before he can reach it. This is camp fare, Monsieur de Laval, but no doubt you will excuse it."

For my own part I had an excellent appetite for the cutlets and the salad, but what I relished above all was to hear the talk of my companions, for I was full of curiosity as to everything which concerned this singular man, whose genius had elevated him so rapidly to the highest position in the world. The head of his household discussed him with an extraordinary frankness.

"What do they say of him in England, Monsieur de Laval?" he asked.

"Nothing very good."

"So I have gathered from their papers. They drive the Emperor frantic, and yet he will insist upon reading them. I am willing to lay a wager that the very first thing which he does when he enters London will be to send cavalry detachments to the various newspaper offices, and to endeavour to seize the editors."

"And the next?"

"The next," said he, laughing, "will be to issue a long proclamation to prove that we have conquered England entirely for the good of the English, and very much against our own inclinations. And then, perhaps, the Emperor will allow the English to understand that, if they absolutely demand a Protestant for a ruler, it is possible that there are a few little points in which he differs from Holy Church."

"Too bad! Too bad!" cried De Meneval, looking amused and yet rather frightened at his companion's audacity. "No doubt for state reasons the Emperor had to tamper a little with Mahommedanism, and I daresay he would attend this Church of St. Paul's as readily as he did the Mosque at Cairo; but it would not do for a ruler to be a bigot. After all, the Emperor has to think for all."

"He thinks too much," said Caulaincourt, gravely. "He thinks so much that other people in France are getting out of the way of thinking at all. You know what I mean, De Meneval, for you have seen it as much as I have."

"Yes, yes," answered the secretary. "He certainly does not encourage originality among those who surround him. I have heard him say many a time that he desired nothing but mediocrity, which was a poor compliment, it must be confessed, to us who have the honour of serving him."

"A clever man at his Court shows his cleverness best

by pretending to be dull," said Caulaincourt, with some bitterness.

"And yet there are many famous characters there," I remarked.

"If so, it is only by concealing their characters that they remain there. His ministers are clerks, his generals are superior aides-de-camp. They are all agents. You have this wonderful man in the middle, and all around you have so many mirrors which reflect different sides of him. In one you see him as a financier, and you call it Lebrun. In another you have him as a *gendarme*, and you name it Savary or Fouché. In yet another he figures as a diplomatist, and is called Talleyrand. You see different figures, but it is really the same man. There is a Monsieur de Caulaincourt, for example, who arranges the household; but he cannot dismiss a servant without permission. It is still always the Emperor. And he plays upon us. We must confess, De Meneval, that he plays upon us. In nothing else do I see so clearly his wonderful cleverness. He will not let us be too friendly lest we combine: He has set his Marshals against each other until there are hardly two of them on speaking terms. Look how Davoust hates Bernadotte, or Lannes and Bessières, or Ney and Massena. It is all they can do to keep their sabres in their sheaths when they meet. And then he knows our weak points. Savary's thirst for money, Cambacérès's vanity, Duroc's bluntness, Berthier's foolishness, Maret's insipidity, Talleyrand's mania for speculation, they are all so many tools in his hand. I do not know what my own greatest weakness may be, but I am sure that he does, and that he uses his knowledge."

"But how he must work!" I exclaimed.

"Ah, you may say so," said De Meneval. "What energy! Eighteen hours out of twenty-four for weeks on end. He has presided over the Legislative Council until they were fainting at their desks. As to me, he will be the death of me, just as he wore out De Bourrienne;

but I will die at my post without a murmur, for if he is hard upon us he is hard upon himself also."

"He was the man for France," said De Caulaincourt. "He is the very genius of system and of order, and of discipline. When one remembers the chaos in which our poor country found itself after the Revolution, when no one would be governed and everyone wanted to govern someone else, you will understand that only Napoleon could have saved us. We were all longing for something fixed to secure ourselves to, and then we came upon this iron pillar of a man. And what a man he was in those days, Monsieur de Laval! You see him now when he has got all that he can want. He is good-humoured and easy. But at that time he had got nothing, but coveted everything. His glance frightened women. He walked the streets like a wolf. People looked after him as he passed. His face was quite different—it was craggy, hollow-cheeked, with an oblique menacing gaze, and the jaws of a pike. Oh, yes, this little Lieutenant Buonaparte from the Military School of Brienne was a singular figure. "There is a man," said I, when I saw him, "who will sit upon a throne or kneel upon a scaffold. And now look at him!"

"And that is ten years ago," I exclaimed.

"Only ten years, and they have brought him from a barrack-room to the Tuileries. But he was born for it. You could not keep him down. De Bourrienne told me that when he was a little fellow at Brienne he had the grand Imperial manner, and would praise or blame, glare or smile, exactly as he does now. Have you seen his mother, Monsieur de Laval? She is a tragedy queen, tall, stern, reserved, silent. There is the spring from which he flowed."

I could see in the gentle, spaniel-eyes of the secretary that he was disturbed by the frankness of De Caulaincourt's remarks.

"You can tell that we do not live under a very terrible tyranny, Monsieur de Laval," said he, "or we should

hardly venture to discuss our ruler so frankly. The fact is that we have said nothing which he would not have listened to with pleasure and perhaps with approval. He has his little frailties, or he would not be human, but take his qualities as a ruler and I would ask you if there has ever been a man who has justified the choice of a nation so completely. He works harder than any of his subjects. He is a general beloved by his soldiers. He is a master beloved by his servants. He never has a holiday, and he is always ready for his work. There is not under the roof of the Tuileries a more abstemious eater or drinker. He educated his brothers at his own expense when he was a very poor man, and he has caused even his most distant relatives to share in his prosperity. In a word, he is economical, hard-working and temperate. We read in the London papers about this Prince of Wales, Monsieur de Laval, and I do not think that he comes very well out of the comparison."

I thought of the long record of Brighton scandals, London scandals, Newmarket scandals, and I had to leave George undefended.

"As I understand it," said I, "it is not the Emperor's private life, but his public ambition, that the English attack."

"The fact is," said De Caulaincourt, "that the Emperor knows, and we all know, that there is not room enough in the world for both France and England. One or other must be supreme. If England were once crushed we could then lay the foundations of a permanent peace. Italy is ours. Austria we can crush again as we have crushed her before. Germany is divided. Russia can expand to the south and east. America we can take at our leisure, finding our pretext in Louisiana or in Canada. There is a world empire waiting for us, and there is the only thing that stops us." He pointed out through the opening of the tent at the broad blue Channel.

Far away, like snow-white gulls in the distance, were the sails of the blockading fleet. I thought again of what

I had seen the night before—the lights of the ships upon the sea and the glow of the camp upon the shore. The powers of the land and of the ocean were face to face whilst a waiting world stood round to see what would come of it.

12. *The Man of Action*

DE MENEVAL'S tent had been pitched in such a way that he could overlook the Royal headquarters, but whether it was that we were too absorbed in the interest of our conversation, or that the Emperor had used the other entrance in returning from the review, we were suddenly startled by the appearance of a captain dressed in the green jacket of the Chasseurs of the Guard, who had come to say that Napoleon was waiting for his secretary. Poor De Meneval's face turned as white as his beautiful ruffles as he sprang to his feet, hardly able to speak for agitation.

"I should have been there!" he gasped. "Oh, what a misfortune! Monsieur de Caulaincourt, you must excuse me! Where is my hat and my sword? Come, Monsieur de Laval, not an instant is to be lost!"

I could judge from the terror of De Meneval, as well as from the scene which I had witnessed with Admiral Bruix, what the influence was which the Emperor exercised over those who were around him. They were never at their ease, always upon the brink of a catastrophe, encouraged one day only to be rudely rebuffed the next, bullied in public and slighted in private, and yet, in spite of it all, the singular fact remains that they loved him and served him as no monarch has been loved and served.

"Perhaps I had best stay here," said I, when we had come to the ante-chamber, which was still crowded with people.

"No, no, I am responsible for you. You must come

with me. Oh, I trust he is not offended with me! How could he have got in without my seeing him?"

My frightened companion scratched at the door, which was opened instantly by Roustem the Mameluke, who guarded it within. The room into which we passed was of considerable size, but was furnished with extreme simplicity. It was papered of a silver-grey colour, with a sky-blue ceiling, in the centre of which was the Imperial eagle in gold, holding a thunderbolt. In spite of the warm weather, a large fire was burning at one side, and the air was heavy with heat and the aromatic smell of aloes. In the middle of the room was a large oval table covered with green cloth and littered with a number of letters and papers. A raised writing-desk was at one side of the table, and behind it in a green morocco chair with curved arms there sat the Emperor. A number of officials were standing round the walls, but he took no notice of them. In his hand he had a small pen-knife, with which he whittled the wooden knob at the end of his chair. He glanced up as we entered, and shook his head coldly at De Meneval.

"I have had to wait for you, Monsieur de Meneval," said he. "I cannot remember that I ever waited for my late secretary, De Bourrienne. That is enough! No excuses! Take this report which I have written in your absence, and make a copy of it."

Poor De Meneval took the paper with a shaking hand, and carried it to the little side table which was reserved for his use. Napoleon rose and paced slowly up and down the room with his hands behind his back, and his big round head stooping a little forwards. It was certainly as well that he had a secretary, for I observed that in writing this single document he had spattered the whole place with ink, and it was obvious that he had twice used his white kerseymere knee-breeches as a pen-wiper. As for me, I stood quietly beside Roustem at the door, and he took not the slightest notice of my presence.

" Well," he cried presently, " is it ready, De Meneval ? We have something more to do."

The secretary half turned in his chair, and his face was more agitated than ever.

" If it please you, sire——" he stammered.

" Well, well, what is the matter now ? "

" If it please you, sire, I find some little difficulty in reading what you have written."

" Tut, tut, sir. You see what the report is about."

" Yes, sirc, it is about forage for the cavalry horses."

Napoleon smiled, and the action made his face look quite boyish.

" You remind me of Cambacérès, De Meneval. When I wrote him an account of the battle of Marengo, he thought that my letter was a rough plan of the engagement. It is incredible how much difficulty you appear to have in reading what I write. This document has nothing to do with cavalry horses, but it contains the instructions to Admiral Villeneuve as to the concentration of his fleet so as to obtain command of the Channel. Give it to me and I will read it to you."

He snatched the paper up in the quick impulsive way which was characteristic of him. But after a long fierce stare he crumpled it up and hurled it under the table.

" I will dictate it to you," said he ; and, pacing up and down the long room, he poured forth a torrent of words, which poor De Meneval, his face shining with his exertions, strove hard to put upon paper. As he grew excited by his own ideas, Napoleon's voice became shriller, his step faster, and he seized his right cuff in the fingers of the samc hand, and twisted his right arm in the singular epileptic gesture which was peculiar to him. But his thoughts and plans were so admirably clear that even I, who knew nothing of the matter, could readily follow them, while above all I was impressed by the marvellous grasp of fact which enabled him to speak with confidence, not only of the line-of-battle ships, but of the frigates, sloops and brigs at Ferrol, Rochefort, Cadiz, Carthagena

and Brest, with the exact strength of each in men and in guns ; while the names and force of the English vessels were equally at his fingers' ends. Such familiarity would have been remarkable in a naval officer, but when I thought that this question of the ships was only one out of fifty with which this man had to deal, I began to realise the immense grasp of that capacious mind. He did not appear to be paying the least attention to me, but it seems that he was really watching me closely, for he turned upon me when he had finished his dictation.

" You appear to be surprised, Monsieur de Laval, that I should be able to transact my naval business without having my minister of marine at my elbow ; but it is one of my rules to know and to do things for myself. Perhaps if these good Bourbons had had the same habit they would not now be living amidst the fogs of England."

" One must have your Majesty's memory in order to do it," I observed.

" It is the result of system," said he. " It is as if I had drawers in my brain, so that when I opened one I could close the others. It is seldom that I fail to find what I want there. I have a poor memory for names or dates, but an excellent one for facts or faces. There is a good deal to bear in mind, Monsieur de Laval. For example, I have, as you have seen, my one little drawer full of the ships upon the sea. I have another which contains all the harbours and forts of France. As an example, I may tell you that when my minister of war was reading me a report of all the coast defences, I was able to point out to him that he had omitted two guns in a battery near Ostend. In yet another of my brain-drawers I have the regiments of France. Is that drawer in order, Marshal Berthier ? "

A clean-shaven man, who had stood biting his nails in the window, bowed at the Emperor's question.

" I am sometimes tempted to believe, sire, that you know the name of every man in the ranks," said he.

" I think that I know most of my old Egyptian

grumblers," said he. "And then, Monsieur de Laval, there is another drawer for canals, bridges, roads, manufactures and every detail of internal administration. The law, finance, Italy, the Colonies, Holland, all these things demand drawers of their own. In these days, Monsieur de Laval, France asks something more of its ruler than that he should carry eight yards of ermine with dignity, or ride after a stag in the forest of Fontainebleau."

I thought of the helpless, gentle, pompous Louis whom my father had once taken me to visit, and I understood that France, after her convulsions and her sufferings, did indeed require another and a stronger head.

"Do you not think so, Monsieur de Laval?" asked the Emperor. He had halted for a moment by the fire, and was grinding his dainty gold-buckled shoe into one of the burning logs.

"You have come to a very wise decision," said he when I had answered his question. "But you have always been of this way of thinking, have you not? Is it not true that you once defended me when some young Englishman was drinking toasts to my downfall at an inn in this village in which you lived?"

I remembered the incident, although I could not imagine how it had reached his ears.

"Why should you have done this?"

"I did it on impulse, sire."

"On impulse!" he cried, in a tone of contempt. "I do not know what people mean when they say that they do things upon impulse. In Charenton things are doubtless done upon impulse, but not amongst sane people. Why should you risk your life over there in defending me when at the time you had nothing to hope for from me?"

"It was because I felt that you stood for France, sire."

During this conversation he had still walked up and down the room, twisting his right arm about, and occasionally looking at one or other of us with his eyeglass, for his sight was so weak that he always needed a single glass indoors and binoculars outside. Sometimes

he stopped and helped himself to great pinches of snuff from a tortoise-shell box, but I observed that none of it ever reached his nose, for he dropped it all from between his fingers on to his waistcoat and the floor. My answer seemed to please him, for he suddenly seized my ear and pulled it with considerable violence.

"You are quite right, my friend," said he. "I stand for France just as Frederic the Second stood for Prussia. I will make her the great Power of the world, so that every monarch in Europe will find it necessary to keep a palace in Paris, and they will all come to hold the train at the coronation of my descendants—" a spasm of pain passed suddenly over his face. "My God! for whom am I building? Who will be my descendants?" I heard him mutter, and he passed his hand over his forehead.

"Do they seem frightened in England about my approaching invasion?" he asked suddenly. "Have you heard them express fears lest I get across the Channel?"

I was forced in truth to say that the only fears which I had ever heard expressed were lest he should not get across.

"The soldiers are very jealous that the sailors should always have the honour," said I.

"But they have a very small army."

"Nearly every man is a volunteer, sire."

"Pooh, conscripts?" he cried, and made a motion with his hands as if to sweep them from before him. "I will land with a hundred thousand men in Kent or in Sussex. I will fight a great battle which I will win with a loss of ten thousand men. On the third day I shall be in London. I will seize the statesmen, the bankers, the merchants, the newspaper men. I will impose an indemnity of a hundred millions of their pounds. I will favour the poor at the expense of the rich, and so I shall have a party. I will detach Scotland and Ireland by giving them constitutions which will put them in a

superior condition to England. Thus I will sow dissensions everywhere. Then as a price for leaving the island I will claim their fleet and their colonies. In this way I shall secure the command of the world to France for at least a century to come."

In this short sketch I could perceive the quality which I have since heard remarked in Napoleon, that his mind could both conceive a large scheme, and at the same time evolve those practical details which would seem to bring it within the bounds of possibility. One instant it would be a wild dream of overrunning the East. The next it was a schedule of the ships, the ports, the stores, the troops, which would be needed to turn dream into fact. He gripped the heart of a question with the same decision which made him strike straight for an enemy's capital. The soul of a poet, and the mind of a man of business of the first order, that is the combination which may make a man dangerous to the world.

I think that it may have been his purpose—for he never did anything without a purpose—to give me an object-lesson of his own capacity for governing, with the idea, perhaps, that I might in turn influence others of the Émigrés by what I told them. At any rate he left me there to stand and to watch the curious succession of points upon which he had to give an opinion during a few hours. Nothing seemed to be either too large or too small for that extraordinary mind. At one instant it was the arrangements for the winter cantonments of two hundred thousand men, at the next he was discussing with De Caulaincourt the curtailing of the expenses of the household, and the possibility of suppressing some of the carriages.

"It is my desire to be economical at home so as to make a good show abroad," said he. "For myself, when I had the honour to be a sub-lieutenant I found that I could live very well upon 1,200 francs a year, and it would be no hardship to me to go back to it. This extravagance of the palace must be stopped. For

example, I see upon your accounts that 155 cups of coffee are drunk a day, which with sugar at 4 francs and coffee at 5 francs a pound come to 20 sous a cup. It would be better to make an allowance for coffee. The stable bills are also too high. At the present price of fodder seven or eight francs a week should be enough for each horse in a stable of two hundred. I will not have any waste at the Tuileries."

Thus within a few minutes he would pass from a question of milliards to a question of sous, and from the management of an empire to that of a stable. From time to time I could observe that he threw a little oblique glance at me as if to ask what I thought of it all, and at the time I wondered very much why my approval should be of any consequence to him. But now, when I look back and see that my following his fortunes brought over so many others of the young nobility, I understand that he saw very much farther than I did.

"Well, Monsieur de Laval," said he suddenly, "you have seen something of my methods. Are you prepared to enter my service?"

"Assuredly, sire," I answered.

"I can be a very hard master when I like," said he, smiling. "You were there when I spoke to Admiral Bruix. We have all our duty to do, and discipline is as necessary in the highest as in the lowest ranks. But anger with me never rises above here," and he drew his hand across his throat. "I never permit it to cloud my brain. Dr. Corvisart here would tell you that I have the slowest pulse of all his patients."

"And that you are the fastest eater, sire," said a large-faced, benevolent-looking person who had been whispering to Marshal Berthier.

"Ohé, you rascal, you rake that up against me, do you? The Doctor will not forgive me because I tell him when I am unwell that I had rather die of the disease than of the remedies. If I eat too fast it is the fault of the State, which does not allow me more than a few minutes for

my meals. Which reminds me that it must be rather after my dinner hour, Constant ? "

" It is four hours after it, sire."

" Serve it up then, at once."

" Yes, sire. Monsieur Isabey is outside, sire, with his dolls."

" Ah, we shall see them at once. Show him in."

A man entered who had evidently just arrived from a long journey. Under his arm he carried a large flat wickerwork basket.

" It is two days since I sent for you, Monsieur Isabey."

" The courier arrived yesterday, sire. I have been travelling from Paris ever since."

" Have you the models there ? "

" Yes, sire."

" Then you may lay them out on that table."

I could not at first imagine what it meant when I saw, upon Isabey opening his basket, that it was crammed with little puppets about a foot high, all of them dressed in the most gorgeous silk and velvet costumes, with trimmings of ermine and hangings of gold lace. But presently, as the designer took them out one by one and placed them on the table, I understood that the Emperor, with his extraordinary passion for detail and for directly controlling everything in his Court, had had these dolls dressed in order to judge the effect of the gorgeous costumes which had been ordered for his grand functionaries upon State occasions.

" What is this ? " he asked, holding up a little lady in hunting costume of amaranth and gold with a toque and plume of white feathers.

" That is for the Empress's hunt, sire."

" You should have the waist rather lower," said Napoleon, who had very definite opinions about ladies' dresses. " These cursed fashions seem to be the only thing in my dominions which I cannot regulate. My tailor, Duchesne, takes three inches from my coat-tails,

and all the armies and fleets of France cannot prevent him. Who is this ? ”

He had picked up a very gorgeous figure in a green coat.

“ That is the grand master of the hunt, sire.”

“ Then it is you, Berthier. How do you like your new costume ? And this in red ? ”

“ That is the Arch-Chancellor.”

“ And the violet ? ”

“ That is the Grand Chamberlain.”

The Emperor was as much amused as a child with a new toy. He formed little groups of the figures upon the table, so that he might have an idea of how the dignitaries would look when they chatted together. Then he threw them all back into the basket.

“ Very good,” said he. “ You and David have done your work very well, Isabey. You will submit these designs to the Court outfitters and have an estimate for the expense. You may tell Lenormand that if she ventures to send in such an account as the last which she sent to the Empress she shall see the inside of Vincennes. You would not think it right, Monsieur de Laval, to spend twenty-five thousand francs upon a single dress, even though it were for Mademoiselle Eugénie de Choiseul.”

Was there anything which this wizard of a man did not know ? What could my love affairs be to him amidst the clash of armies and the struggles of nations ? When I looked at him, half in amazement and half in fear, that pleasant boyish smile lit up his pale face, and his plump little hand rested for an instant upon my shoulder. His eyes were of a bright blue when he was amused, though they would turn dark when he was thoughtful, and steel-grey in moments of excitement.

“ You were surprised when I told you a little while ago about your encounter with the Englishman in the village inn. You are still more surprised now when I tell you about a certain young lady. You must certainly have thought that I was very badly served by my agents in

England if I did not know such important details as these."

"I cannot conceive, sire, why such trifles should be reported to you, or why you should for one instant remember them."

"You are certainly a very modest young man, and I hope you will not lose that charming quality when you have been for a little time at my Court. So you think that your own private affairs are of no importance to me?"

"I do not know why they should be, sire."

"What is the name of your great-uncle?"

"He is the Cardinal de Laval de Montmorency."

"Precisely. And where is he?"

"He is in Germany."

"Quite so—in Germany, and not at Notre Dame, where I should have placed him. Who is your first cousin?"

"The Duke de Rohan."

"And where is he?"

"In London."

"Yes, in London, and not at the Tuileries, where he might have had what he liked for the asking. I wonder if I were to fall whether I should have followers as faithful as those of the Bourbons. Would the men that I have made go into exile and refuse all offers until I should return? Come here, Berthier!" he took his favourite by the ear with the caressing gesture which was peculiar to him. "Could I count upon you, you rascal—eh?"

"I do not understand you, sire." Our conversation had been carried on in a voice which had made it inaudible to the other people in the room, but now they were all listening to what Berthier had to say.

"If I were driven out, would you go into exile also?"

"No, sire."

"Diable! At least you are frank."

"I could not go into exile, sire."

"And why?"

"Because I should be dead, sire."

Napoleon began to laugh.

" And there are some who say that our Berthier is dull-witted," said he. " Well, I think I am pretty sure of you, Berthier, for although I am fond of you for reasons of my own I do not think that you would be of much value to anyone else. Now I could not say that of you, Monsieur Talleyrand. You would change very quickly to a new master as you have changed from an old one. You have a genius, you know, for adapting yourself."

There was nothing which the Emperor loved more than to suddenly produce little scenes of this sort which made everybody very uncomfortable, for no one could tell what awkward or compromising question he was going to put to them next. At present, however, they all forgot their own fears of what might come in their interest at the reply which the famous diplomatist might make to a suggestion which everybody knew to be so true. He stood, leaning upon his black ebony stick, with his bulky shoulders stooping forward, and an amused smile upon his face, as if the most innocent of compliments had been addressed to him. One of his few titles to respect is that he always met Napoleon upon equal terms, and never condescended to fawn upon him or to flatter him.

" You think I should desert you, sire, if your enemies offered me more than you have given me ? "

" I am perfectly sure that you would."

" Well, really I cannot answer for myself, sire, until the offer has been made. But it will have to be a very large one. You see, apart from my very nice hotel in the Rue St. Florentin, and the two hundred thousand or so which you are pleased to allow me, there is my position as the first minister in Europe. Really, sire, unless they put me on the throne I cannot see how I can better my position."

" No, I think I have you pretty safe," said Napoleon, looking hard at him with thoughtful eyes. " By the way, Talleyrand, you must either marry Madame Grand or get rid of her, for I cannot have a scandal about the Court."

I was astounded to hear so delicate and personal a matter discussed in this public way, but this also was characteristic of the rule of this extraordinary man, who proclaimed that he looked upon delicacy and good taste as two of the fetters with which mediocrity attempted to cripple genius. There was no question of private life, from the choosing of a wife to the discarding of a mistress, that this young conqueror of thirty-six did not claim the right of discussing and of finally settling. Talleyrand broke once more into his benevolent but inscrutable smile.

"I suppose that it is from early association, sire," said he, "but my instincts are to avoid marriage."

Napoleon began to laugh.

"I forget sometimes that it is really the Bishop of Autun to whom I am speaking," said he. "I think that perhaps I have interest enough with the Pope to ask him, in return for any little attention which we gave him at the Coronation, to show you some leniency in this matter. She is a clever woman, this Madame Grand. I have observed that she listens with attention."

Talleyrand shrugged his rounded shoulders.

"Intellect in a woman is not always an advantage, sire. A clever woman compromises her husband. A stupid woman only compromises herself."

"The cleverest woman," said Napoleon, "is the woman who is clever enough to conceal her cleverness. The women in France have always been a danger, for they are cleverer than the men. They cannot understand that it is their hearts and not their heads that we want. When they have had influence upon a monarch, they have invariably ruined his career. Look at Henry the Fourth and Louis the Fourteenth. They are all ideologists, dreamers, sentimentalists, full of emotion and energy, but without logic or foresight. Look at that accursed Madame de Staël! Look at the Salons of the Quartier St. Germain! Their eternal clack, clack, clack give me more trouble than the fleet of England. Why cannot they look after their babies and their needlework? I

suppose you think that these are very dreadful opinions, Monsieur de Laval ? "

It was not an easy question to answer, so I was silent.

" You have not at your age become a practical man," said the Emperor. " You will understand then. I dare say that I thought as you do at the time when the stupid Parisians were saying what a misalliance the widow of the famous General de Beauharnais was making by marrying the unknown Buonaparte. It was a beautiful dream ! There are nine inns in a single day's journey between Milan and Mantua, and I wrote a letter to my wife from each of them. Nine letters in a day—but one becomes disillusioned, monsieur. One learns to accept things as they are."

I could not but think what a beautiful young man he must have been before he had learned to accept things as they are. The glamour, the romance—what a bald dead thing is life without it ! His own face had clouded over as if that old life had perhaps had a charm which the Emperor's crown had never given. It may be that those nine letters written in one day at wayside inns had brought him more true joy than all the treaties by which he had torn provinces from his neighbours. But the sentiment passed from his face, and he came back in his sudden concise fashion to my own affairs.

" Eugénie de Choiseul is the niece of the Duc de Choiseul, is she not ? " he asked.

" Yes, sire."

" You are affianced ! "

" Yes, sire."

He shook his head impatiently.

" If you wish to advance yourself in my Court, Monsieur de Laval," said he, " you must commit such matters to my care. Is it likely that I can look with indifference upon a marriage between émigrés—an alliance between my enemies ? "

" But she shares my opinions, sire."

" Ta, ta, ta, at her age one has no opinions. She has

the émigré blood in her veins, and it will come out. Your marriage shall be my care, Monsieur de Laval. And I wish you to come to the Pont de Briques that you may be presented to the Empress. What is it, Constant ? "

" There is a lady outside who desires to see your Majesty. Shall I tell her to come later ? "

" A lady ! " cried the Emperor, smiling. " We do not see many faces in the camp which have not a moustache upon them. Who is she ? What does she want ? "

" Her name, sire, is Mademoiselle Sibylle Bernac."

" What ! " cried Napoleon. " It must be the daughter of old Bernac of Grosbois. By the way, Monsieur de Laval, he is your uncle upon your mother's side, is he not ? "

I may have flushed with shame as I acknowledged it, for the Emperor read my feelings.

" Well, well, he has not a very savoury trade, it is true, and yet I can assure you that it is one which is very necessary to me. By the way, this uncle of yours, as I understand, holds the estates which should have descended to you, does he not ? "

" Yes, sire."

His blue eyes flashed suspicion at me.

" I trust that you are not joining my service merely in the hope of having them restored to you."

" No, sire. It is my ambition to make a career for myself."

" It is a prouder thing," said the Emperor, " to found a family than merely to perpetuate one. I could not restore your estates, Monsieur de Laval, for things have come to such a pitch in France that if one once begins restorations the affair is endless. It would shake all public confidence. I have no more devoted adherents than the men who hold land which does not belong to them. As long as they serve me, as your uncle serves me, the land must remain with them. But what can this young lady require of me ? Show her in, Constant ! "

An instant later my cousin Sibylle was conducted into

the room. Her face was pale and set, but her large dark eyes were filled with resolution, and she carried herself like a princess.

" Well, mademoiselle, why do you come here ? What is it that you want ? " asked the Emperor in the brusque manner which he adopted to women, even if he were wooing them.

Sibylle glanced round, and as our eyes met for an instant I felt that my presence had renewed her courage. She looked bravely at the Emperor as she answered him.

" I come, sire, to implore a favour of you."

" Your father's daughter has certainly claims upon me, mademoiselle. What is it that you wish ? "

" I do not ask it in my father's name, but in my own. I implore you, sire, to spare the life of Monsieur Lucien Lesage, who was arrested yesterday upon a charge of treason. He is a student, sire—a mere dreamer who has lived away from the world and has been made a tool by designing men."

" A dreamer ! " cried the Emperor harshly. " They are the most dangerous of all." He took a bundle of notes from his table and glanced them over. " I presume that he is fortunate enough to be your lover, mademoiselle ? "

Sibylle's pale face flushed, and she looked down before the Emperor's keen sardonic glance.

" I have his examination here. He does not come well out of it. I confess that from what I see of the young man's character I should not say that he is worthy of your love."

" I implore you to spare him, sire."

" What you ask is impossible, mademoiselle. I have been conspired against from two sides—by the Bourbons and by the Jacobins. Hitherto I have been too long-suffering, and they have been encouraged by my patience. Since Cadoudal and the Duc d'Enghien died the Bourbons have been quiet. Now I must teach the same lesson to these others."

I was astonished and am still astonished at the passion with which my brave and pure cousin loved this cowardly and low-minded man, though it is but in accordance with that strange law which draws the extremes of nature together. As she heard the Emperor's stern reply the last sign of colour faded from her pale face, and her eyes were dimmed with despairing tears, which gleamed upon her white cheeks like dew upon the petals of a lily.

"For God's sake, sire! For the love of your mother spare him!" she cried, falling upon her knees at the Emperor's feet. "I will answer for him that he never offends you again."

"Tut, tut!" cried Napoleon angrily, turning upon his heel and walking impatiently up and down the room. "I cannot grant you what you ask, mademoiselle. When I say so once it is finished. I cannot have my decisions in high matters of State affected by the intrusion of women. The Jacobins have been dangerous of late, and an example must be made or we shall have the Faubourg St. Antoine upon our hands once more.".

The Emperor's set face and firm manner showed it was hopeless, and yet my cousin persevered as no one but a woman who pleads for her lover would have dared to do.

"He is harmless, sire."

"His death will frighten others."

"Spare him and I will answer for his loyalty."

"What you ask is impossible."

Constant and I raised her from the ground.

"That is right, Monsieur de Laval," said the Emperor. "This interview can lead to nothing. Remove your cousin from the room!"

But she had again turned to him with a face which showed that even now all hope had not been abandoned.

"Sire," she cried. "You say that an example must be made. There is Toussac——!"

"Ah, if I could lay my hands upon Toussac!"

"He is the dangerous man. It was he and my father who led Lucien on. If an example must be made it

should be an example of the guilty rather than of the innocent."

"They are both guilty. And, besides, we have our hands upon the one but not upon the other."

"But if I could find him?"

Napoleon thought for a moment.

"If you do," said he, "Lesage will be forgiven!"

"But I cannot do it in a day."

"How long do you ask?"

"A week at the least."

"Then he has a respite of a week. If you can find Toussac in the time, Lesage will be pardoned. If not he will die upon the eighth day. It is enough. Monsieur de Laval, remove your cousin, for I have matters of more importance to attend to. I shall expect you one evening at the Pont de Briques, when you are ready to be presented to the Empress."

13. *The Man of Dreams*

WHEN I had escorted my cousin Sibylle from the presence of the Emperor, I was surprised to find the same young hussar officer waiting outside who had commanded the guard which had brought me to the camp.

"Well, mademoiselle, what luck?" he asked excitedly, clanking towards us.

For answer Sibylle shook her head.

"Ah, I feared as much, for the Emperor is a terrible man. It was brave, indeed, of you to attempt it. I had rather charge an unshaken square upon a spent horse than ask him for anything. But my heart is heavy, mademoiselle, that you should have been unsuccessful." His boyish blue eyes filled with tears and his fair moustache drooped in such a deplorable fashion, that I could have laughed had the matter been less serious.

"Lieutenant Gerard chanced to meet me, and escorted

me through the camp," said my cousin. "He has been kind enough to give me sympathy in my trouble."

"And so do I, Sibylle," I cried; "you carried yourself like an angel, and it is a lucky man who is blessed with your love. I trust that he may be worthy of it."

She turned cold and proud in an instant when anyone threw a doubt upon this wretched lover of hers.

"I know him as neither the Emperor nor you can do," said she. "He has the heart and soul of a poet, and he is too high-minded to suspect the intrigues to which he has fallen a victim. But as to Toussac, I should have no pity upon him, for I know him to be a murderer five times over, and I know also that there will be no peace in France until he has been taken. Cousin Louis, will you help me to do it?"

The lieutenant had been tugging at his moustache and looking me up and down with a jealous eye.

"Surely, mademoiselle, you will permit me to help you?" he cried in a piteous voice.

"I may need you both," said she. "I will come to you if I do. Now I will ask you to ride with me to the edge of the camp and there to leave me."

She had a quick imperative way which came charmingly from those sweet womanly lips. The grey horse upon which I had come to the camp was waiting beside that of the hussar, so we were soon in the saddle. When we were clear of the huts my cousin turned to us.

"I had rather go alone now," said she. "It is understood, then, that I can rely upon you."

"Entirely," said I.

"To the death," cried Gerard.

"It is everything to me to have two brave men at my back," said she, and so, with a smile, gave her horse its head and cantered off over the downland in the direction of Grosbois.

For my part I remained in thought for some time, wondering what plan she could have in her head by which she hoped to get upon the track of Toussac. A woman's

wit, spurred by the danger of her lover, might perhaps succeed where Fouché and Savary had failed. When at last I turned my horse I found my young hussar still staring after the distant rider.

"My faith! There is the woman for you, Étienne!" he kept repeating. "What an eye! What a smile! What a rider! And she is not afraid of the Emperor. Oh, Étienne, here is the woman who is worthy of you!"

These were the little sentences which he kept muttering to himself until she vanished over the hill, when he became conscious at last of my presence.

"You are mademoiselle's cousin?" he asked. "You are joined with me in doing something for her. I do not yet know what it is, but I am perfectly ready to do it."

"It is to capture Toussac."

"Excellent!"

"In order to save the life of her lover."

There was a struggle in the face of the young hussar, but his more generous nature won.

"Sapristi! I will do even that if it will make her the happier!" he cried, and he shook the hand which I extended towards him. "The Hussars of Berchény are quartered over yonder, where you see the lines of picketed horses. If you will send for Lieutenant Étienne Gerard you will find a sure blade always at your disposal. Let me hear from you then, and the sooner the better!" He shook his bridle and was off, with youth and gallantry in every line of him, from his red toupet and flowing dolman to the spur which twinkled on his heel.

But for four long days no word came from my cousin as to her quest, nor did I hear from this grim uncle of mine at the Castle of Grosbois. For myself I had gone into the town of Boulogne and had hired such a room as my thin purse could afford over the shop of a baker named Vidal, next to the Church of St. Augustin, in the Rue des Vents. Only last year I went back there under that strange impulse which leads the old to tread once

more with dragging feet the same spots which have sounded to the crisp tread of their youth. The room is still there, the very pictures and the plaster head of Jean Bart which used to stand upon the side table. As I stood with my back to the narrow window, I had around me every smallest detail upon which my young eyes had looked; nor was I conscious that my own heart and feelings had undergone much change. And yet there, in the little round glass which faced me, was the long-drawn, weary face of an aged man, and out of the window, when I turned, were the bare and lonely downs which had been peopled by that mighty host of a hundred and fifty thousand men. To think that the Grand Army should have vanished away like a shredding cloud upon a windy day, and yet that every sordid detail of a bourgeois lodging should remain unchanged! Truly, if man is not humble it is not for want of having his lesson taught to him by Nature.

My first care after I had chosen my room was to send to Grosbois for that poor little bundle which I had carried ashore with me that squally night from the English lugger. My next was to use the credit which my favourable reception by the Emperor and his assurance of employment had given me in order to obtain such a wardrobe as would enable me to appear without discredit among the richly dressed courtiers and soldiers who surrounded him. It was well known that it was his whim that he should himself be the only plainly-dressed man in the company, and that in the most luxurious times of the Bourbons there was never a period when fine linen and a brave coat were more necessary for a man who would keep in favour. A new court and a young empire cannot afford to take anything for granted.

It was upon the morning of the fifth day that I received a message from Duroc, who was the head of the household, that I was to attend the Emperor at the headquarters in the camp, and that a seat in one of the Imperial carriages would be at my disposal that I might proceed with the

Court to Pont de Briques, there to be present at the reception of the Empress. When I arrived I was shown at once through the large entrance tent, and admitted by Constant into the room beyond, where the Emperor stood with his back to the fire, kicking his heels against the grate. Talleyrand and Berthier were in attendance, and De Meneval, the secretary, sat at the writing-table.

"Ah, Monsieur de Laval," said the Emperor with a friendly nod. "Have you heard anything yet of your charming cousin?"

"Nothing, sire," I answered.

"I fear that her efforts will be in vain. I wish her every success, for we have no reason at all to fear this miserable poet, while the other is formidable. All the same, an example of some sort must be made."

The darkness was drawing in, and Constant had appeared with a taper to light the candles, but the Emperor ordered him out.

"I like the twilight," said he. "No doubt, Monsieur de Laval, after your long residence in England you find yourself also most at home in a dim light. I think that the brains of these people must be as dense as their fogs, to judge by the nonsense which they write in their accursed papers." With one of those convulsive gestures which accompanied his sudden outbursts of passion he seized a sheaf of late London papers from the table, and ground them into the fire with his heel. "An editor!" he cried in the guttural rasping voice which I had heard when I first met him. "What is he? A dirty man with a pen in a back office. And he will talk like one of the great Powers of Europe. I have had enough of this freedom of the Press. There are some who would like to see it established in Paris. You are among them, Talleyrand. For my part I see no need for any paper at all except the *Moniteur* by which the Government may make known its decisions to the people."

"I am of opinion, sire," said the minister, "that it is better to have open foes than secret ones, and that it is

less dangerous to shed ink than blood. What matter if your enemies have leave to rave in a few Paris papers, as long as you are at the head of five hundred thousand armed men ? "

" Ta, ta, ta ! " cried the Emperor impatiently. " You speak as if I had received my crown from my father the late king. But even if I had, it would be intolerable, this government by newspaper. The Bourbons allowed themselves to be criticised, and where are they now ? Had they used their Swiss Guards as I did the Grenadiers upon the eighteenth Brumaire what would have become of their precious National Assembly ? There was a time when a bayonet in the stomach of Mirabeau might have settled the whole matter. Later it took the heads of a king and queen and the blood of a hundred thousand people."

He sat down, and stretched his plump, white-clad legs towards the fire. Through the blackened shreds of the English papers the red glow beat upwards upon the beautiful, pallid, sphinx-like face—the face of a poet, of a philosopher—of anything rather than of a ruthless and ambitious soldier. I have heard folk remark that no two portraits of the Emperor are alike, and the fault does not lie with the artists but with the fact that every varying mood made him a different man. But in his prime, before his features became heavy, I, who have seen sixty years of mankind, can say that in repose I have never looked upon a more beautiful face.

" You have no dreams and no illusions, Talleyrand," said he. " You are always practical, cold and cynical. But with me, when I am in the twilight, as now, or when I hear the sound of the sea, my imagination begins to work. It is the same when I hear some music—especially music which repeats itself again and again like some pieces of Passaniello. They have a strange effect upon me, and I begin to Ossianise. I get large ideas and great aspirations. It is at such times that my mind always turns to the East, that swarming ant-heap of the human

race, where alone it is possible to be very great. I renew my dreams of '98. I think of the possibility of drilling and arming these vast masses of men, and of precipitating them upon Europe. Had I conquered Syria I should have done this, and the fate of the world was really decided at the siege of Acre. With Egypt at my feet I already pictured myself approaching India, mounted upon an elephant, and holding in my hand a new version of the Koran which I had myself composed. I have been born too late. To be accepted as a world's conqueror one must claim to be divine. Alexander declared himself to be the son of Jupiter, and no one questioned it. But the world has grown old, and has lost its enthusiasms. What would happen if I were to make the same claim? Monsieur de Talleyrand would smile behind his hand, and the Parisians would write little lampoons upon the walls."

He did not appear to be addressing us, but rather to be expressing his thoughts aloud, while allowing them to run to the most fantastic and extravagant lengths. This it was which he called Ossianising, because it recalled to him the wild vague dreams of the Gaelic Ossian, whose poems had always had a fascination for him. De Meneval has told me that for an hour at a time he has sometimes talked in this strain of the most intimate thoughts and aspirations of his heart, while his courtiers have stood round in silence waiting for the instant when he would return once more to his practical and incisive self.

"The great ruler," said he, "must have the power of religion behind him as well as the power of the sword. It is more important to command the souls than the bodies of men. The Sultan, for example, is the head of the faith as well as of the army. So were some of the Roman Emperors. My position must be incomplete until this is accomplished. At the present instant there are thirty departments in France where the Pope is more powerful than I am. It is only by universal dominion that peace can be assured in the world. When there is

only one authority in Europe, seated at Paris, and when all the kings are so many lieutenants who hold their crowns from the central power of France, it is then that the reign of peace will be established. Many powers of equal strength must always lead to struggles until one becomes predominant. Her central position, her wealth and her history, all mark France out as being the power which will control and regulate the others. Germany is divided. Russia is barbarous. England is insular, France only remains."

I began to understand as I listened to him that my friends in England had not been so far wrong when they had declared that as long as he lived—this little thirty-six-year-old artilleryman—there could not possibly be any peace in the world. He drank some coffee which Constant had placed upon the small round table at his elbow. Then he leaned back in his chair once more, still staring moodily at the red glow of the fire, with his chin sunk upon his chest.

" In those days," said he, " the kings of Europe will walk behind the Emperor of France in order to hold up his train at his coronation. Each of them will have to maintain a palace in Paris, and the city will stretch as far as Versailles. These are the plans which I have made for Paris if she will show herself to be worthy of them. But I have no love for them, these Parisians, and they have none for me, for they cannot forget that I turned my guns upon them once before, and they know that I am ready to do so again. I have made them admire me and fear me, but I have never made them like me. Look what I have done for them. Where are the treasures of Genoa, the pictures and statues of Venice and of the Vatican ? They are in the Louvre. The spoils of my victories have gone to decorate her. But they must always be changing, always chattering. They wave their hats at me now, but they would soon be waving their fists if I did not give them something to talk over and to wonder at. When other things are quiet, I have the dome

of the Invalides regilded to keep their thoughts from mischief. Louis XIV gave them wars. Louis XV gave them the gallantries and scandals of his Court. Louis XVI gave them nothing, so they cut off his head. It was you who helped to bring him to the scaffold, Talleyrand."

"No, sire, I was always a moderate."

"At least, you did not regret his death."

"The less so, since it has made room for you, sire."

"Nothing could have held me down, Talleyrand. I was born to reach the highest. It has always been the same with me. I remember when we were arranging the Treaty of Campo Formio—I a young general under thirty—there was a high vacant throne with the Imperial arms in the Commissioner's tent. I instantly sprang up the steps, and threw myself down upon it. I could not endure to think that there was anything above myself. And all the time I knew in my heart all that was going to happen to me. Even in the days when my brother Lucien and I lived in a little room upon a few francs a week, I knew perfectly well that the day would come when I should stand where I am now. And yet I had no prospects and no reason for any great hopes. I was not clever at school. I was only the forty-second out of fifty-eight. At mathematics I had perhaps some ability, but at nothing else. The truth is that I was always dreaming when the others were working. There was nothing to encourage my ambition, for the only thing which I inherited from my father was a weak stomach. Once, when I was very young, I went up to Paris with my father and my sister Caroline. We were in the Rue Richelieu, and we saw the king pass in his carriage. Who would have thought that the little boy from Corsica, who took his hat off and stared, was destined to be the next monarch of France? And yet even then I felt as if that carriage ought to belong to me. What is it, Constant?"

The discreet valet bent down and whispered something to the Emperor.

"Ah, of course," said he. "It was an appointment. I had forgotten it. Is she there?"

"Yes, sire."

"In the side room?"

Talleyrand and Berthier exchanged glances, and the minister began to move towards the door.

"No, no, you can remain here," said the Emperor. "Light the lamps, Constant, and have the carriages ready in half-an-hour. Look over this draft of a letter to the Emperor of Austria, and let me have your observations upon it, Talleyrand. De Meneval, there is a lengthy report here as to the new dockyard at Brest. Extract what is essential from it, and leave it upon my desk at five o'clock to-morrow morning. Berthier, I will have the whole army into the boats at seven. We will see if they can embark within three hours. Monsieur de Laval, you will wait here until we start for Pont de Briques." So with a crisp order to each of us, he walked with little swift steps across the room, and I saw his square green back and white legs framed for an instant in the doorway. There was the flutter of a pink skirt beyond, and then the curtains closed behind him.

Berthier stood biting his nails, while Talleyrand looked at him with a slight raising of his bushy eyebrows. De Meneval with a rueful face was turning over the great bundle of papers which had to be copied by morning. Constant, with a noiseless tread, was lighting the candles upon the sconces round the room.

"Which is it?" I heard the minister whisper.

"The girl from the Imperial Opera," said Berthier.

"Is the little Spanish lady out of favour, then?"

"No, I think not. She was here yesterday."

"And the other, the Countess?"

"She has a cottage at Ambleteuse."

"But we must have no scandal about the Court," said

Talleyrand, with a sour smile, recalling the moral sentiments with which the Emperor had reproved him. "And now, Monsieur de Laval," he added, drawing me aside, "I very much wish to hear from you about the Bourbon party in England. You must have heard their views. Do they imagine that they have any chance of success?"

And so for ten minutes he plied me with questions, which showed me clearly that the Emperor had read him aright, and that he was determined, come what might, to be upon the side which won. We were still talking when Constant entered hurriedly, with a look of anxiety and perplexity which I could not have imagined upon so smooth and imperturbable a face.

"Good Heavens, Monsieur Talleyrand," he cried, clasping and unclasping his hands. "Such a misfortune! Who could have expected it?"

"What is it, then, Constant?"

"Oh, Monsieur, I dare not intrude upon the Emperor. And yet . . . And yet . . . The Empress is outside, and she is coming in."

14. *Josephine*

AT this unexpected announcement Talleyrand and Berthier looked at each other in silence, and for once the trained features of the great diplomatist, who lived behind a mask, betrayed the fact that he was still capable of emotion. The spasm which passed over them was caused, however, rather by mischievous amusement than by consternation, while Berthier—who had an honest affection for both Napoleon and Josephine—ran frantically to the door as if to bar the Empress from entering. Constant rushed towards the curtains which screened the Emperor's room, and then, losing courage, although he was known to be a stout-hearted man, he came running back to Talleyrand for advice. It was too

late now, however, for Roustem the Mameluke had opened the door, and two ladies had entered the room. The first was tall and graceful, with a smiling face, and an affable though dignified manner. She was dressed in a black velvet cloak with white lace at the neck and sleeves, and she wore a black hat with a curling white feather. Her companion was shorter, with a countenance which would have been plain had it not been for the alert expression and large dark eyes, which gave it charm and character. A small black terrier dog had followed them in, but the first lady turned and handed the thin steel chain with which she led it to the Mameluke attendant.

"You had better keep Fortune outside, Roustem," said she, in a peculiarly sweet musical voice. "The Emperor is not very fond of dogs, and if we intrude upon his quarters we cannot do less than consult his tastes. Good evening, Monsieur de Talleyrand! Madame de Rémusat and I have driven all along the cliffs, and we have stopped as we passed to know if the Emperor is coming to Pont de Briques. But perhaps he has already started. I had expected to find him here."

"His Imperial Majesty was here a short time ago," said Talleyrand, bowing and rubbing his hands.

"I hold my *salon*—such a *salon* as Pont de Briques is capable of—this evening, and the Emperor promised me that he would set his work aside for once, and favour us with his presence. I wish we could persuade him to work less, Monsieur de Talleyrand. He has a frame of iron, but he cannot continue in this way. These nervous attacks come more frequently upon him. He will insist upon doing everything, everything himself. It is noble, but it is to be a martyr. I have no doubt that at the present moment—but you have not yet told me where he is, Monsieur de Talleyrand."

"We expect him every instant, your Majesty."

"In that case we shall sit down and await his return. Ah, Monsieur de Meneval, how I pity you when I see you among all those papers! I was desolate when

Monsieur de Bourrienne deserted the Emperor, but you have more than taken his place. Come up to the fire, Madame de Rémusat! Yes, yes, I insist upon it, for I know that you must be cold. Constant, come and put the rug under Madame de Rémusat's feet."

It was by little acts of thoughtfulness and kindness like this that the Empress so endeared herself that she had really no enemies in France, even among those who were most bitterly opposed to her husband. Whether as the consort of the first man in Europe, or as the lonely divorced woman eating her heart out at Malmaison, she was always praised and beloved by those who knew her. Of all the sacrifices which the Emperor ever made to his ambition, that of his wife was the one which cost him the greatest struggle and the keenest regret.

Now as she sat before the fire in the same chair which had so recently been occupied by the Emperor, I had an opportunity of studying this person, whose strange fate had raised her from being the daughter of a lieutenant of artillery to the first position among the women of Europe. She was six years older than Napoleon, and on this occasion, when I saw her first, she was in her forty-second year ; but at a little distance or in a discreet light, it was no courtier's flattery to say that she might very well have passed for thirty. Her tall, elegant figure was girlish in its supple slimness, and she had an easy and natural grace in every movement, which she inherited with her tropical West Indian blood. Her features were delicate, and I have heard that in her youth she was strikingly beautiful ; but, like most Creole women, she had become *passée* in early middle age. She had made a brave fight, however—with art as her ally—against the attacks of time, and her success had been such that when she sat aloof upon a dais or drove past in a procession, she might still pass as a lovely woman. In a small room, however, or in a good light, the crude pinks and whites with which she had concealed her sallow cheeks became painfully harsh and artificial. Her own natural beauty,

however, still lingered in that last refuge of beauty—the eyes, which were large, dark and sympathetic. Her mouth, too, was small and amiable, and her most frequent expression was a smile, which seldom broadened into a laugh, as she had her own reasons for preferring that her teeth should not be seen. As to her bearing, it was so dignified, that if this little West Indian had come straight from the loins of Charlemagne, it could not have been improved upon. Her walk, her glance, the sweep of her dress, the wave of her hand—they had all the happiest mixture of the sweetness of a woman and the condescension of a queen. I watched her with admiration as she leaned forward, picking little pieces of aromatic aloes wood out of the basket and throwing them on to the fire.

"Napoleon likes the smell of burning aloes," said she. "There was never anyone who had such a nose as he, for he can detect things which are quite hidden from me."

"The Emperor has an excellent nose for many things," said Talleyrand. "The State contractors have found that out to their cost."

"Oh, it is dreadful when he comes to examine accounts —dreadful, Monsieur de Talleyrand! Nothing escapes him. He will make no allowances. Everything must be exact. But who is this young gentleman, Monsieur de Talleyrand? I do not think that he has been presented to me."

The minister explained in a few words that I had been received into the Emperor's personal service, and Josephine congratulated me upon it with the most kindly sympathy.

"It eases my mind so to know that he has brave and loyal men round him. Ever since that dreadful affair of the infernal machine I have always been uneasy if he is away from me. He is really safest in time of war, for it is only then that he is away from the assassins who hate him. And now I understand that a new Jacobin plot has only just been discovered."

"This is the same Monsieur de Laval who was there when the conspirator was taken," said Talleyrand.

The Empress overwhelmed me with questions, hardly waiting for the answers in her anxiety.

"But this dreadful man Toussac has not been taken yet," she cried. "Have I not heard that a young lady is endeavouring to do what has baffled the secret police, and that the freedom of her lover is to be the reward of her success?"

"She is my cousin, your Imperial Majesty. Mademoiselle Sibylle Bernac is her name."

"You have only been in France a few days, Monsieur de Laval," said Josephine, smiling, "but it seems to me that all the affairs of the Empire are already revolving round you. You must bring this pretty cousin of yours —the Emperor said that she is pretty—to Court with you, and present her to me. Madame de Rémusat, you will take a note of the name."

The Empress had stooped again to the basket of aloes wood which stood beside the fireplace. Suddenly I saw her stare hard at something, and then, with a little cry of surprise, she stooped and lifted an object from the carpet. It was the Emperor's soft flat beaver with the little tricolour cockade. Josephine sprang up, and looked from the hat in her hand to the imperturbable face of the minister.

"How is this, Monsieur de Talleyrand," she cried, and the dark eyes began to shine with anger and suspicion. "You said to me that the Emperor was out, and here is his hat!"

"Pardon me, your Imperial Majesty, I did not say that he was out."

"What did you say, then?"

"I said that he left the room a short time before."

"You are endeavouring to conceal something from me," she cried, with the quick instinct of a woman.

"I assure you that I tell you all I know."

The Empress's eyes darted from face to face.

" Marshal Berthier," she cried, " I insist upon your telling me this instant where the Emperor is, and what he is doing."

The slow-witted soldier stammered and twisted his cocked hat about.

" I know no more than Monsieur de Talleyrand does," said he ; " the Emperor left us some time ago."

" By which door ?

Poor Berthier was more confused than ever.

" Really, your Imperial Majesty, I cannot undertake to say by which door it was that the Emperor quitted the apartment."

Josephine's eyes flashed round at me, and my heart shrunk within me as I thought that she was about to ask me that same dreadful question. But I had just time to breathe one prayer to the good Saint Ignatius, who has always been gracious to our family, and the danger passed.

" Come, Madame de Rémusat," said she. " If these gentlemen will not tell us we shall very soon find out for ourselves."

She swept with great dignity towards the curtained door, followed at the distance of a few yards by her waiting lady, whose frightened face and lagging, unwilling steps showed that she perfectly appreciated the situation. Indeed, the Emperor's open infidelities, and the public scenes to which they gave rise, were so notorious, that even in Ashford they had reached our ears. Napoleon's self-confidence and his contempt of the world had the effect of making him careless as to what was thought or said of him, while Josephine, when she was carried away by jealousy, lost all the dignity and restraint which usually marked her conduct ; so between them they gave some embarrassing moments to those who were about them. Talleyrand turned away with his fingers over his lips, while Berthier, in an agony of apprehension, continued to double up and to twist the cocked hat which he held between his hands. Only Constant, the faithful

valet, ventured to intervene between his mistress and the fatal door.

" If your Majesty will resume your seat I shall inform the Emperor that you are here," said he, with two deprecating hands outstretched .

" Ah, then he *is* there ! " she cried furiously. " I see it all ! I understand it all ! But I will expose him—I will reproach him with his perfidy ! Let me pass, Constant ! How dare you stand in my way ? "

" Allow me to announce you, your Majesty."

" I shall announce myself." With swift undulations of her beautiful figure she darted past the protesting valet, parted the curtains, threw open the door, and vanished into the next room.

She had seemed a creature full of fire and of spirit as, with a flush which broke through the paint upon her cheeks, and with eyes which gleamed with the just anger of an outraged wife, she forced her way into her husband's presence. But she was a woman of change and impulse, full of little squirts of courage and corresponding reactions into cowardice. She had hardly vanished from our sight when there was a harsh roar, like an angry beast, and next instant Josephine came flying into the room again, with the Emperor, inarticulate with passion, raving at her heels. So frightened was she, that she began to run towards the fireplace, upon which Madame de Rémusat, who had no wish to form a rearguard upon such an occasion, began running also, and the two of them, like a pair of startled hens, came rustling and fluttering back to the seats which they had left. There they cowered whilst the Emperor, with a convulsed face and a torrent of camp-fire oaths, stamped and raged about the room.

" You, Constant, you ! " he shouted ; " is this the way in which you serve me ? Have you no sense, then —no discretion ? Am I never to have any privacy ? Must I eternally submit to be spied upon by women ? Is everyone else to have liberty, and I only to have none ?

As to you, Josephine, this finishes it all. I had hesitations before, but now I have none. This brings everything to an end between us."

We would all, I am sure, have given a good deal to slip from the room—at least, my own embarrassment far exceeded my interest—but the Emperor from his lofty standpoint cared as little about our presence as if we had been so many articles of furniture. In fact, it was one of this strange man's peculiarities that it was just those delicate and personal scenes with which privacy is usually associated that he preferred to have in public, for he knew that his reproaches had an additional sting when they fell upon other ears besides those of his victim. From his wife to his groom there was not one of those who were about him who did not live in dread of being held up to ridicule and infamy before a smiling crowd, whose amusement was only tempered by the reflection that each of them might be the next to endure the same exposure.

As to Josephine, she had taken refuge in a woman's last resource, and was crying bitterly, with her graceful neck stooping towards her knees and her two hands over her face. Madame de Rémusat was weeping also, and in every pause of his hoarse scolding—for his voice was very hoarse and raucous when he was angry—there came the soft hissing and clicking of their sobs. Sometimes his fierce taunts would bring some reply from the Empress, some gentle reproof to him for his gallantries, but each remonstrance only excited him to a fresh rush of vituperation. In one of his outbursts he threw his snuff-box with a crash upon the floor as a spoiled child would hurl down its toys.

"Morality?" he cried, "morality was not made for me, and I was not made for morality. I am a man apart, and I accept nobody's conditions. I tell you always, Josephine, that these are the foolish phrases of mediocre people who wish to fetter the great. They do not apply to me. I will never consent to frame my conduct by the puerile arrangements of society."

" Have you no feeling, then ? " sobbed the Empress.

" A great man is not made for feeling. It is for him to decide what he shall do, and then to do it without interference from anyone. It is your place, Josephine, to submit to all my fancies, and you should think it quite natural that I should allow myself some latitude."

It was a favourite device of the Emperor's, when he was in the wrong upon one point, to turn the conversation round so as to get upon some other one on which he was in the right. Having worked off the first explosion of his passion he now assumed the offensive, for in argument, as in war, his instinct was always to attack.

" I have been looking over Lenormand's accounts, Josephine," said he. " Are you aware how many dresses you have had last year ? You have had a hundred and forty—no less—and many of them cost as much as twenty-five thousand livres. I am told that you have six hundred dresses in your wardrobes, many of which have hardly ever been used. Madame de Rémusat knows that what I say is true. She cannot deny it."

" You like me to dress well, Napoleon."

" I will not have such monstrous extravagance. I could have two regiments of cuirassiers, or a fleet of frigates, with the money which you squander upon foolish silks and furs. It might turn the fortunes of a campaign. Then again, Josephine, who gave you permission to order that parure of diamonds and sapphires from Lefebvre ? The bill has been sent to me and I have refused to pay for it. If he applies again, I shall have him marched to prison between a file of grenadiers, and your milliner shall accompany him there."

The Emperor's fits of anger, although tempestuous, were never very prolonged. The curious convulsive wriggle of one of his arms, which always showed when he was excited, gradually died away, and after looking for some time at the papers of De Meneval—who had written away like an automaton during all this uproar—

he came across to the fire with a smile upon his lips, and a brow from which the shadow had departed.

"You have no excuse for extravagance, Josephine," said he, laying his hand upon her shoulder. "Diamonds and fine dresses are very necessary to an ugly woman in order to make her attractive, but *you* cannot need them for such a purpose. You had no fine dresses when first I saw you in the Rue Chautereine, and yet there was no woman in the world who ever attracted me so. Why will you vex me, Josephine, and make me say things which seem unkind? Drive back, little one, to Pont de Briques, and see that you do not catch cold."

"You will come to the salon, Napoleon?" asked the Empress, whose bitterest resentment seemed to vanish in an instant at the first kindly touch from his hand. She still held her handkerchief before her eyes, but it was chiefly, I think, to conceal the effect which her tears had had upon her cheeks.

"Yes, yes, I will come. Our carriages will follow yours. See the ladies into the berline, Constant. Have you ordered the embarkation of the troops, Berthier? Come here, Talleyrand, for I wish to describe my views about the future of Spain and Portugal. Monsieur de Laval, you may escort the Empress to Pont de Briques, where I shall see you at the reception."

15. *The Reception of the Empress*

PONT DE BRIQUES is but a small village, and this sudden arrival of the Court, which was to remain for some weeks, had crammed it with visitors. It would have been very much simpler to have come to Boulogne, where there were more suitable buildings and better accommodation, but Napoloen had named Pont de Briques, so Pont de Briques it had to be. The word impossible was not permitted amongst those who had to carry out his wishes. So an army of cooks and

footmen settled upon the little place, and then there arrived the dignitaries of the new Empire, and then the ladies of the Court, and then their admirers from the camp. The Empress had a château for her accommodation. The rest quartered themselves in cottages or where they best might, and waited ardently for the moment which was to take them back to the comforts of Versailles or Fontainebleau.

The Empress had graciously offered me a seat in her berline, and all the way to the village, entirely forgetful apparently of the scene through which she passed, she chatted away, asking me a thousand personal questions about myself and my affairs, for a kindly curiosity in the doings of everyone around her was one of her most marked characteristics. Especially was she interested in Eugénie, and as the subject was one upon which I was equally interested in talking it ended in a rhapsody upon my part, amid little sympathetic ejaculations from the Empress and titterings from Madame de Rémusat.

"But you must certainly bring her over to the Court!" cried the kindly woman. "Such a paragon of beauty and of virtue must not be allowed to waste herself in this English village. Have you spoken about her to the Emperor?"

"I found that he knew all about her, your Majesty."

"He knows all about everything. Oh, what a man he is! You heard him about those diamonds and sapphires. Lefebvre gave me his word that no one should know of it but ourselves, and that I should pay at my leisure, and yet you see that the Emperor knew. But what did he say, Monsieur de Laval?"

"He said that my marriage should be his affair."

Josephine shook her head and groaned.

"But this is serious, Monsieur de Laval. He is capable of singling out any one of the ladies of the Court and marrying you to her within a week. It is a subject upon which he will not listen to argument. He has brought about some extraordinary matches in this way.

But I will speak to the Emperor before I return to Paris, and I will see what I can arrange for you."

I was still endeavouring to thank her for her sympathy and kindness when the berline rattled up the drive and pulled up at the entrance to the château, where the knot of scarlet footmen and the bearskins of two sentries from the Guards announced the Imperial quarters. The Empress and her lady hurried away to prepare their toilets for the evening, and I was shown at once into the salon, in which the guests had already begun to assemble.

This was a large square room furnished as modestly as the sitting-room of a provincial gentleman would be likely to be. The wall-paper was gloomy, and the furniture was of dark mahogany upholstered in faded blue nankeen, but there were numerous candles in candelabra upon the tables and in sconces upon the walls which gave an air of festivity even to these sombre surroundings. Out of the large central room were several smaller ones in which card-tables had been laid out, and the doorways between had been draped with Oriental chintz. A number of ladies and gentlemen were standing about, the former in the high evening dresses to which the Emperor had given his sanction, the latter about equally divided between the civilians in black court costumes and the soldiers in their uniforms. Bright colours and graceful draperies predominated, for in spite of his lectures about economy the Emperor was very harsh to any lady who did not dress in a manner which would sustain the brilliancy of his Court. The prevailing fashions gave an opening to taste and to display, for the simple classical costumes had died out with the Republic, and Oriental dresses had taken their place as a compliment to the Conqueror of Egypt. Lucretia had changed to Zuleika, and the salons which had reflected the austerity of old Rome had turned suddenly into so many Eastern harems.

On entering the room I had retired into a corner, fearing that I should find none there whom I knew ; but

someone plucked at my arm, and turning round I found myself looking into the yellow inscrutable face of my uncle Bernac. He seized my unresponsive hand and wrung it with a false cordiality.

" My dear Louis," said he. " It was really the hope of meeting you here which brought me over from Grosbois—although you can understand that living so far from Paris I cannot afford to miss such an opportunity of showing myself at Court. Nevertheless I can assure you that it was of you principally that I was thinking. I hear that you have had a splendid reception from the Emperor, and that you have been taken into his personal service. I had spoken to him about you, and I made him fully realise that if he treats you well he is likely to coax some of the other young émigrés into his service."

I was convinced that he was lying, but none the less I had to bow and utter a few words of cold thanks.

" I see that you still bear me some grudge for what passed between us the other day," said he, " but really, my dear Louis, you have no occasion to do so. It was your own good which I had chiefly at heart. I am neither a young nor a strong man, Louis, and my profession, as you have seen, is a dangerous one. There is my child, and there is my estate. Who takes one, takes both. Sibylle is a charming girl, and you must not allow yourself to be prejudiced against her by any ill temper which she may have shown towards me. I will confess that she had some reason to be annoyed at the turn which things had taken. But I hope to hear that you have now thought better upon this matter."

" I have never thought about it at all, and I beg that you will not discuss it," said I curtly.

He stood in deep thought for a few moments, and then he raised his evil face and his cruel grey eyes to mine.

" Well, well, that is settled then," said he. " But you cannot bear me a grudge for having wished you to be my successor. Be reasonable, Louis. You must acknowledge that you would now be six feet deep in the salt-

marsh with your neck broken if I had not stood your friend, at some risk to myself. Is that not true ? "

" You had your own motive for that," said I.

" Very likely. But none the less I saved you. Why should you bear me ill will ? It is no fault of mine if I hold your estate."

" It is not on account of that."

" Why is it, then ?

I could have explained that it was because he had betrayed his comrades, because his daughter hated him, because he had ill-used his wife, because my father regarded him as the source of all his troubles—but the salon of the Empress was no place for a family quarrel, so I merely shrugged my shoulders, and was silent.

" Well, I am very sorry," said he, " for I had the best of intentions towards you. I could have advanced you, for there are few men in France who exercise more influence. But I have one request to make to you."

" What is that, sir ? "

" I have a number of personal articles, belonging to your father—his sword, his seals, a deskful of letters, some silver plate—such things in short as you would wish to keep in memory of him. I should be glad if you will come to Grosbois—if it is only for one night—and look over these things, choosing what you wish to take away. My conscience will then be clear about them."

I promised readily that I would do so.

" And when would you come ? " he asked eagerly. Something in the tone of his voice aroused my suspicions, and glancing at him I saw exultation in his eyes. I remembered the warning of Sibylle.

" I cannot come until I have learned what my duties with the Emperor are to be. When that is settled I shall come."

" Very good. Next week perhaps, or the week afterwards. I shall expect you eagerly, Louis. I rely upon your promise, for a Laval was never known to break one." With another unanswered squeeze of my hand, he slipped

off among the crowd, which was growing denser every instant in the salon.

I was standing in silence thinking over this sinister invitation of my uncle's, when I heard my own name, and, looking up, I saw De Caulaincourt, with his brown handsome face and tall elegant figure, making his way towards me.

" It is your first entrance at Court, is it not, Monsieur de Laval," said he, in his high-bred cordial manner ; " you should not feel lonely, for there are certainly many friends of your father here who will be overjoyed to make the acquaintance of your father's son. From what De Meneval told me I gather that you know hardly anyone —even by sight."

" I know the Marshals," said I ; " I saw them all at the council in the Emperor's tent. There is Ney with the red head. And there is Lefebvre with his singular mouth, and Bernadotte with the beak of a bird of prey."

" Precisely. And that is Rapp, with the round, bullet head. He is talking to Junot, the handsome dark man with the whiskers. These poor soldiers are very unhappy."

" Why so ? " I asked.

" Because they are all men who have risen from nothing. This society and etiquette terrifies them much more than all the dangers of war. When they can hear their sabres clashing against their big boots they feel at home, but when they have to stand about with their cocked hats under their arms, and have to pick their spurs out of the ladies' trains, and talk about David's picture or Passaniello's opera, it prostrates them. The Emperor will not even permit them to swear, although he has no scruples upon his own account. He tells them to be soldiers with the army, and courtiers with the Court, but the poor fellows cannot help being soldiers all the time. Look at Rapp with his twenty wounds, endeavouring to exchange little delicate drolleries with that young lady. There, you see, he has said something which would

have passed very well with a vivandière, but it has made her fly to her mamma, and he is scratching his head, for he cannot imagine how he has offended her."

"Who is the beautiful woman with the white dress and the tiara of diamonds?" I asked.

"That is Madame Murat, who is the sister of the Emperor. Caroline is beautiful, but she is not as pretty as her sister Marie, whom you see over yonder in the corner. Do you see the tall stately dark-eyed old lady with whom she is talking? That is Napoleon's mother—a wonderful woman, the source of all their strength, shrewd, brave, vigorous, forcing respect from everyone who knows her. She is as careful and as saving as when she was the wife of a small country gentleman in Corsica, and it is no secret that she has little confidence in the permanence of the present state of things, and that she is always laying by for an evil day. The Emperor does not know whether to be amused or exasperated by her precautions. Well, Murat, I suppose we shall see you riding across the Kentish hop-fields before long."

The famous soldier had paused opposite to us, and shook hands with my companion. His elegant well-knit figure, large fiery eyes, and noble bearing made this innkeeper's boy a man who would have drawn attention and admiration to himself in any assembly in Europe. His mop of curly hair and thick red lips gave that touch of character and individuality to his appearance which redeem a handsome face from insipidity.

"I am told that it is devilish bad country for cavalry—all cut up into hedges and ditches," said he. "The roads are good, but the fields are impossible. I hope that we are going soon, Monsieur de Caulaincourt, for our men will all settle down as gardeners if this continues. They are learning more about watering-pots and spuds than about horses and sabres."

."The army, I hear, is to embark to-morrow."

"Yes, yes, but you know very well that they will disembark again upon the wrong side of the Channel.

Unless Villeneuve scatters the English fleet, nothing can be attempted."

"Constant tells me that the Emperor was whistling 'Malbrook' all the time that he was dressing this morning, and that usually comes before a move."

"It was very clever of Constant to tell what tune it was which the Emperor was whistling," said Murat, laughing. "For my part I do not think that he knows the difference between the 'Malbrook' and the 'Marseillaise.' Ah, here is the Empress—and how charming she is looking!"

Josephine had entered, with several of her ladies in her train, and the whole assembly rose to do her honour. The Empress was dressed in an evening gown of rose-coloured tulle, spangled with silver stars—an effect which might have seemed meretricious and theatrical in another woman, but which she carried off with great grace and dignity. A little sheaf of diamond wheat-ears rose above her head, and swayed gently as she walked. No one could entertain more charmingly than she, for she moved about among the people with her amiable smile, setting everybody at their ease by her kindly natural manner, and by the conviction which she gave them that she was thóroughly at her ease herself.

"How amiable she is!" I exclaimed. "Who could help loving her?"

"There is only one family which can resist her," said De Caulaincourt, glancing round to see that Murat was out of hearing. "Look at the faces of the Emperor's sisters."

I was shocked when I followed his direction to see the malignant glances with which these two beautiful women were following the Empress as she walked about the room. They whispered together and tittered maliciously. Then Madame Murat turned to her mother behind her, and the stern old lady tossed her haughty head in derision and contempt.

"They feel that Napoleon is theirs and that they

ought to have everything. They cannot bear to think that she is Her Imperial Majesty and they are only Her Highness. They all hate her, Joseph, Lucien—all of them. When they had to carry her train at the coronation they tried to trip her up, and the Emperor had to interfere. Oh yes, they have the real Corsican blood, and they are not very comfortable people to get along with."

But in spite of the evident hatred of her husband's family, the Empress appeared to be entirely unconcerned and at her ease as she strolled about among the groups of her guests with a kindly glance and a pleasant word for each of them. A tall, soldierly man, brown-faced and moustached, walked beside her, and she occasionally laid her hand with a caressing motion upon his arm.

"That is her son, Eugène de Beauharnais," said my companion.

"Her son!" I exclaimed, for he seemed to me to be the older of the two.

De Caulaincourt smiled at my surprise.

"You know she married Beauharnais when she was very young—in fact she was hardly sixteen. She has been sitting in her boudoir while her son has been baking in Egypt and Syria, so that they have pretty well bridged over the gap between them. Do you see the tall, handsome, clean-shaven man who has just kissed Josephine's hand. That is Talma the famous actor. He once helped Napoleon at a critical moment of his career, and the Emperor has never forgotten the debt which the Consul contracted. That is really the secret of Talleyrand's power. He lent Napoleon a hundred thousand francs before he set out for Egypt, and now, however much he distrusts him, the Emperor cannot forget that old kindness. I have never known him to abandon a friend or to forgive an enemy. If you have once served him well you may do what you like afterwards. There is one of his coachmen who is drunk from morning to night. But he gained the cross at Marengo, and so he is safe."

De Caulaincourt had moved on to speak with some lady, and I was again left to my own thoughts, which turned upon this extraordinary man, who presented himself at one moment as a hero and at another as a spoiled child, with his nobler and his worse side alternating so rapidly that I had no sooner made up my mind about him than some new revelation would destroy my views and drive me to some fresh conclusion. That he was necessary to France was evident, and that in serving him one was serving one's country. But was it an honour or a penance to serve him? Was he worthy merely of obedience, or might love and esteem be added to it? These were the questions which we found it difficult to answer—and some of us will never have answered them up to the end of time.

The company had now lost all appearance of formality, and even the soldiers seemed to be at their ease. Many had gone into the side rooms, where they had formed tables for whist and for vingt-et-un. For my own part I was quite entertained by watching the people, the beautiful women, the handsome men, the bearers of names which had been heard of in no previous generation, but which now rung round the world. Immediately in front of me were Ney, Lannes and Murat chatting together and laughing with the freedom of the camp. Of the three, two were destined to be executed in cold blood and the third to die upon the battle-field, but no coming shadow ever cast a gloom upon their cheery, full-blooded lives.

A small, silent, middle-aged man, who looked unhappy and ill at ease, had been leaning against the wall beside me. Seeing that he was as great a stranger as myself, I addressed some observation to him, to which he replied with great good-will, but in the most execrable French.

"You don't happen to understand English?" he asked. "I've never met one living soul in this country who did."

"Oh yes, I understand it very well, for I have lived

most of my life over yonder. But surely you are not English, sir? I understood that every Englishman in France was under lock and key ever since the breach of the treaty of Amiens."

"No, I am not English," he answered, "I am an American. My name is Robert Fulton, and I have to come to these receptions because it is the only way in which I can keep myself in the memory of the Emperor, who is examining some inventions of mine which will make great changes in naval warfare."

Having nothing else to do I asked this curious American what his inventions might be, and his replies very soon convinced me that I had to do with a madman. He had some idea of making a ship go against the wind and against the current by means of coal or wood which was to be burned inside of her. There was some other nonsense about floating barrels full of gunpowder which would blow a ship to pieces if she struck against them. I listened to him at the time with an indulgent smile, but now looking back from the point of vantage of my old age I can see that not all the warriors and statesmen in that room—no, not even the Emperor himself—have had as great an effect upon the history of the world as that silent American who looked so drab and so commonplace among the gold-slashed uniforms and the Oriental dresses.

But suddenly our conversation was interrupted by a hush in the room—such a cold, uncomfortable hush as comes over a roomful of happy, romping children when a grave-faced elder comes amongst them. The chatting and the laughter died away. The sound of the rustling cards and of the clicking counters had ceased in the other rooms. Everyone, men and women, had risen to their feet with a constrained expectant expression upon their faces. And there in the doorway were the pale face and the green coat with the red cordon across the white waistcoat.

There was no saying how he might behave upon these

occasions. Sometimes he was capable of being the merriest and most talkative of the company, but this was rather in his consular than in his imperial days. On the other hand he might be absolutely ferocious, with an insulting observation for everyone with whom he came in contact. As a rule he was between these two extremes, silent, morose, ill at ease, shooting out curt little remarks which made everyone uncomfortable. There was always a sigh of relief when he would pass from one room into the next.

On this occasion he seemed to have not wholly recovered from the storm of the afternoon, and he looked about him with a brooding eye and a lowering brow. It chanced that I was not very far from the door, and that his glance fell upon me.

"Come here, Monsieur de Laval," said he. He laid his hand upon my shoulder and turned to a big, gaunt man who had accompanied him into the room. "Look here, Cambacérès, you simpleton," said he. "You always said that the old families would never come back, and that they would settle in England as the Huguenots have done. You see that, as usual, you have miscalculated, for here is the heir of the De Lavals come to offer his services. Monsieur de Laval, you are now my aide-de-camp, and I beg you to keep with me wherever I go."

This was promotion indeed, and yet I had sense enough to know that it was not for my own sweet sake that the Emperor had done it, but in order to encourage others to follow me. My conscience approved what I had done, for no sordid motive and nothing but the love of my country had prompted me; but now, as I walked round behind Napoleon, I felt humiliated and ashamed, like a prisoner led behind the car of his captor.

And soon there was something else to make me ashamed, and that was the conduct of him whose servant I had become. His manners were outrageous. As he had himself said, it was his nature to be always first, and this being so he resented those courtesies and gallantries

by which men are accustomed to disguise from women the fact that they are the weaker sex. The Emperor, unlike Louis XIV, felt that even a temporary and conventional attitude of humility towards a woman was too great a condescension from his own absolute supremacy. Chivalry was among those conditions of society which he refused to accept.

To the soldiers he was amiable enough, with a nod and a joke for each of them. To his sisters also he said a few words, though rather in the tone of a drill-sergeant to a pair of recruits. It was only when the Empress had joined him that his ill-humour came to a head.

"I wish you would not wear those wisps of pink about your head, Josephine," said he, pettishly. "All that women have to think about is how to dress themselves, and yet they cannot even do that with moderation or taste. If I see you again in such a thing I will thrust it in the fire as I did your shawl the other day."

"You are so hard to please, Napoleon. You like one day what you cannot abide the next. But I will certainly change it if it offends you," said Josephine, with admirable patience.

The Emperor took a few steps between the people, who had formed a lane for us to pass through. Then he stopped and looked over his shoulder at the Empress.

"How often have I told you, Josephine, that I cannot tolerate fat women."

"I always bear it in mind, Napoleon."

"Then why is Madame de Chevreux present?"

"But surely, Napoleon, madame is not very fat."

"She is fatter than she should be. I should prefer not to see her. Who is this?" He had paused before a young lady in a blue dress, whose knees seemed to be giving way under her as the terrible Emperor transfixed her with his searching eyes.

"This is Mademoiselle de Bergerot."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-three, sire."

"It is time that you were married. Every woman should be married at twenty-three. How is it that you are not married?"

The poor girl appeared to be incapable of answering, so the Empress gently remarked that it was to the young men that that question should be addressed.

"Oh, that is the difficulty, is it?" said the Emperor. "We must look about and find a husband for you." He turned, and to my horror I found his eyes fixed with a questioning gaze upon my face.

"We have to find you a wife also, Monsieur de Laval," said he. "Well, well, we shall see—we shall see. What is your name?" to a quiet refined man in black.

"I am Grétry, the musician."

"Yes, yes, I remember you. I have seen you a hundred times, but I can never recall your name. Who are you?"

"I am Joseph de Chenier."

"Of course. I have seen your tragedy. I have forgotten the name of it, but it was not good. You have written some other poetry, have you not?"

"Yes, sire. I had your permission to dedicate my last volume to you."

"Very likely, but I have not had time to read it. It is a pity that we have no poets now in France, for the deeds of the last few years would have given a subject for a Homer or a Virgil. It seems that I can create kingdoms but not poets. Whom do you consider to be the greatest French writer?"

"Racine, sire."

"Then you are a blockhead, for Corneille was infinitely greater. I have no ear for metre or trivialities of the kind, but I can sympathise with the spirit of poetry, and I am conscious that Corneille is far the greatest of poets. I would have made him my prime minister had he had the good fortune to live in my epoch. It is his intellect which I admire, his knowledge of the human heart, and his profound feeling. Are you writing anything at present?"

" I am writing a tragedy upon Henry IV, sire."

" It will not do, sir. It is too near the present day, and I will not have politics upon the stage. Write a play about Alexander. What is your name ? "

He had pitched upon the same person whom he had already addressed.

" I am still Grétry, the musician," said he meekly.

The Emperor flushed for an instant at the implied rebuke. He said nothing, however, but passed on to where several ladies were standing together near the door of the card-room.

" Well, madame," said he to the nearest of them, " I hope you are behaving rather better. When last I heard from Paris your doings were furnishing the Quartier St. Germain with a good deal of amusement and gossip."

" I beg that your Majesty will explain what you mean," said she with spirit.

" They had coupled your name with that of Colonel Lasalle."

" It is a foul calumny, sire."

" Very possibly, but it is awkward when so many calumnies cluster round one person. You are certainly a most unfortunate lady in that respect. You had a scandal once before with General Rapp's aide-de-camp. This must come to an end. What is your name ? " he continued, turning to another.

" Mademoiselle de Périgord."

" Your age ? "

" Twenty."

" You are very thin and your elbows are red. My God, Madame Boismaison, are we never to see anything but this same grey gown and the red turban with the diamond crescent ? "

" I have never worn it before, sire."

" Then you had another the same, for I am weary of the sight of it. Let me never see you in it again.

Monsieur de Rémusat, I make you a good allowance. Why do you not spend it ? ”

“ I do, sire.”

“ I hear that you have been putting down your carriage. I do not give you money to hoard in a bank, but I give it to you that you may keep up a fitting appearance with it. Let me hear that your carriage is back in the coach-house when I return to Paris. Junot, you rascal, I hear that you have been gambling and losing.”

“ The most infernal run of luck, sire,” said the soldier, “ I give you my word that the ace fell four times running.”

“ Ta, ta, you are a child, with no sense of the value of money. How much do you owe ? ”

“ Forty thousand, sire.”

“ Well, well, go to Lebrun and see what he can do for you. After all, we were together at Toulon.”

“ A thousand thanks, sire.”

“ Tut ! You and Rapp and Lasalle are the spoiled children of the army. But no more cards, you rascal ! I do not like low dresses, Madame Picard. They spoil even pretty women, but in you they are inexcusable. Now, Josephine, I am going to my room, and you can come in half an hour and read me to sleep. I am tired to-night, but I came to your salon, since you desired that I should help you in welcoming and entertaining your guests. You can remain here, Monsieur de Laval, for your presence will not be necessary until I send you my orders.”

And so the door closed behind him, and with a long sigh of relief from everyone, from the Empress to the waiter with the negus, the friendly chatter began once more, with the click of the counters and the rustle of the cards just as they had been before he came to help in the entertainment.

16. *The Library of Grosbois*

AND now, my friends, I am coming to the end of those singular adventures which I encountered upon my arrival in France, adventures which might have been of some interest in themselves had I not introduced the figure of the Emperor, who has eclipsed them all as completely as the sun eclipses the stars. Even now, you see, after all these years, in an old man's memoirs, the Emperor is still true to his traditions, and will not brook any opposition. As I draw his words and his deeds I feel that my own poor story withers before them. And yet if it had not been for that story I should not have had an excuse for describing to you my first and most vivid impressions of him, and so it has served a purpose after all. You must bear with me now while I tell you of our expedition to the Red Mill and of what befell in the library of Grosbois.

Two days had passed away since the reception of the Empress Josephine, and only one remained of the time which had been allowed to my cousin Sibylle in which she might save her lover, and capture the terrible Toussac. For my own part I was not so very anxious that she should save this craven lover of hers, whose handsome face belied the poor spirit within him. And yet this lonely beautiful woman, with the strong will and the loyal heart, had touched my feelings, and I felt that I would help her to anything—even against my own better judgment, if she should desire it. It was then with a mixture of feelings that late in the afternoon I saw her and General Savary enter the little room in which I lodged at Boulogne. One glance at her flushed cheeks and triumphant eyes told me that she was confident in her own success.

"I told you that I would find him, Cousin Louis!" she cried; "I have come straight to you, because you said that you would help in the taking of him."

"Mademoiselle insists upon it that I should not use soldiers," said Savary, shrugging his shoulders.

"No, no, no," she cried with vehemence. "It has to be done with discretion, and at the sight of a soldier he would fly to some hiding-place, where you would never be able to follow him. I cannot afford to run a risk. There is too much already at stake."

"In such an affair three men are as useful as thirty," said Savary. "I should not in any case have employed more. You say that you have another friend, Lieutenant—— ?"

"Lieutenant Gerard of the Hussars of Berchény."

"Quite so. There is not a more gallant officer in the Grand Army than Étienne Gerard. The three of us, Monsieur de Laval, should be equal to any adventure."

"I am at your disposal."

"Tell us, then, mademoiselle, where Toussac is hiding."

"He is hiding at the Red Mill."

"But we have searched it, I assure you that he is not there."

"When did you search it ?"

"Two days ago."

"Then he has come there since. I knew that Jeanne Portal loved him. I have watched her for six days. Last night she stole down to the Red Mill with a basket of wine and fruit. All the morning I have seen her eyes sweeping the country-side, and I have read the terror in them whenever she has seen the twinkle of a bayonet. I am as sure that Toussac is in the mill as if I had seen him with my own eyes."

"In that case there is not an instant to be lost," cried Savary. "If he knows of a boat upon the coast he is as likely as not to slip away after dark and make his escape for England. From the Red Mill one can see all the surrounding country, and Mademoiselle is right in thinking that a large body of soldiers would only warn him to escape."

"What do you propose, then ?" I asked.

"That you meet us at the south gate of the camp in

an hour's time dressed as you are. You might be any gentleman travelling upon the high road. I shall see Gerard, and we shall adopt some suitable disguise. Bring your pistols, for it is with the most desperate man in France we have to do. We shall have a horse at your disposal."

The setting sun lay dull and red upon the western horizon, and the white chalk cliffs of the French coast had all flushed into pink when I found myself once more at the gate of the Boulogne Camp. There was no sign of my companions, but a tall man, dressed in a blue coat with brass buttons like a small country farmer, was tightening the girth of a magnificent black horse, whilst a little further on a slim young ostler was waiting by the roadside, holding the bridles of two others. It was only when I recognised one of the pair as the horse which I had ridden on my first coming to camp that I answered the smile upon the keen handsome face of the ostler, and saw the swarthy features of Savary under the broad-brimmed hat of the farmer.

"I think that we may travel without fearing to excite suspicion," said he. "Crook that straight back of yours a little, Gerard! And now we shall push upon our way, or we may find that we are too late."

My life has had its share of adventures, and yet, somehow, this ride stands out above the others. There over the waters I could dimly see the loom of the English coast, with its suggestions of dreamy villages, humming bees, and the pealing of Sunday bells. I thought of the long, white High Street of Ashford, with its red brick houses, and the inn with the great swinging sign. All my life had been spent in these peaceful surroundings, and now, here I was with a spirited horse between my knees, two pistols peeping out of my holsters, and a commission upon which my whole future might depend, to arrest the most redoubtable conspirator in France. No wonder that, looking back over many dangers and many vicissitudes, it is still that evening ride over the short

crisp turf of the downs which stands out most clearly in my memory. One becomes *blasé* to adventure, as one becomes *blasé* to all else which the world can give, save only the simple joys of home, and to taste the full relish of such an expedition one must approach it with the hot blood of youth still throbbing in one's veins.

Our route, when we had left the uplands of Boulogne behind us, lay along the skirts of that desolate marsh in which I had wandered, and so inland, through plains of fern and bramble, until the familiar black keep of the Castle of Grosbois rose upon the left. Then, under the guidance of Savary, we struck to the right down a sunken road, and so over the shoulder of a hill until, on a further slope beyond, we saw the old windmill black against the evening sky. Its upper window burned red like a spot of blood in the last rays of the setting sun. Close by the door stood a cart full of grain sacks, with the shafts pointing downwards and the horse grazing at some distance. As we gazed, a woman appeared upon the downs and stared round, with her hand over her eyes.

"See that!" said Savary eagerly. "He is there sure enough, or why should they be on their guard? Let us take this road which winds round the hill, and they will not see us until we are at the very door."

"Should we not gallop forward?" I suggested.

"The ground is too cut up. The longer way is the safer. As long as we are upon the road they cannot tell us from any other travellers."

We walked our horses along the path, therefore, with as unconcerned an air as we could assume; but a sharp exclamation made us glance suddenly round, and there was the woman standing on a hillock by the roadside and gazing down at us with a face that was rigid with suspicion. The sight of the military bearing of my companions changed all her fear into certainties. In an instant she had whipped the shawl from her shoulders, and was waving it frantically over her head. With a hearty curse Savary spurred his horse up the bank and

galloped straight for the mill, with Gerard and myself at his heels.

It was only just in time. We were still a hundred paces from the door when a man sprang out from it, and gazed about him, his head whisking this way and that. There could be no mistaking the huge bristling beard, the broad chest, and the rounded shoulders of Toussac. A glance showed him that we would ride him down before he could get away, and he sprang back into the mill, closing the heavy door with a clang behind him.

"The window, Gerard, the window!" cried Savary.

There was a small, square window opening into the basement room of the mill. The young hussar disengaged himself from the saddle and flew through it as the clown goes through the hoops at Franconi's. An instant later he had opened the door for us, with the blood streaming from his face and hands.

"He has fled up the stair," said he.

"Then we need be in no hurry, since he cannot pass us," said Savary, as we sprang from our horses. "You have carried his first line of entrenchments most gallantly, Lieutenant Gerard. I hope you are not hurt?"

"A few scratches, General, nothing more."

"Get your pistols, then. Where is the miller?"

"Here I am," said a squat, rough little fellow, appearing in the open doorway. "What do you mean, you brigands, by entering my mill in this fashion? I am sitting reading my paper and smoking my pipe of colts-foot, as my custom is about this time of the evening, and suddenly, without a word, a man comes flying through my window, covers me with glass, and opens my door to his friends outside. I've had trouble enough with my one lodger all day without three more of you turning up."

"You have the conspirator Toussac in your house."

"Toussac!" cried the miller. "Nothing of the kind. His name is Maurice, and he is a merchant in silks."

" He is the man we want. We come in the Emperor's name."

The miller's jaw dropped as he listened.

" I don't know who he is, but he offered a good price for a bed and I asked no more questions. In these days one cannot expect a certificate of character from every lodger. But, of course, if it is a matter of State, why, it is not for me to interfere. But, to do him justice, he was a quiet gentleman enough until he had that letter just now."

" What letter ? Be careful what you say, you rascal, for your own head may find its way into the sawdust basket."

" It was a woman who brought it. I can only tell you what I know. He has been talking like a madman ever since. It made my blood run cold to hear him. There's someone whom he swears he will murder. I shall be very glad to see the last of him."

" Now, gentlemen," said Savary, drawing his sword, " we may leave our horses here. There is no window for forty feet, so he cannot escape from us. If you will see that your pistols are primed, we shall soon bring the fellow to terms."

The stair was a narrow winding one made of wood, which led to a small loft lighted from a slit in the wall.

Some remains of wood and a litter of straw showed that this was where Toussac had spent his day. There was, however, no sign of him now, and it was evident that he had ascended the next flight of steps. We climbed them, only to find our way barred by a heavy door.

" Surrender, Toussac ! " cried Savary. " It is useless to attempt to escape us."

A hoarse laugh sounded from behind the door.

" I am not a man who surrenders. But I will make a bargain with you. I have a small matter of business to do to-night. If you will leave me alone, I will give you my solemn pledge to surrender at the camp to-morrow. I have a little debt that I wish to pay. It is only to-day that I understood to whom I owed it."

"What you ask is impossible."

"It would save you a great deal of trouble."

"We cannot grant such a request. You must surrender."

"You'll have some work first."

"Come, come, you cannot escape us. Put your shoulders against the door! Now, all together?"

There was the hot flash of a pistol from the key-hole, and a bullet smacked against the wall between us. We hurled ourselves against the door. It was massive, but rotten with age. With a splintering and rending it gave way before us. We rushed in, weapons in hand, to find ourselves in an empty room.

"Where the devil has he got to?" cried Savary, glaring round him. "This is the top room of all. There is nothing above it."

It was a square empty space with a few cornbags littered about. At the further side was an open window, and beside it lay a pistol, still smoking from the discharge. We all rushed across, and, as we craned our heads over, a simultaneous cry of astonishment escaped from us.

The distance to the ground was so great that no one could have survived the fall, but Toussac had taken advantage of the presence of that cart full of grain-sacks, which I have described as having lain close to the mill. This had both shortened the distance and given him an excellent means of breaking the fall. Even so, however, the shock had been tremendous, and as we looked out he was lying panting heavily upon the top of the bags. Hearing our cry, however, he looked up, shook his fist defiantly, and, rolling from the cart, he sprang on to the back of Savary's black horse, and galloped off across the downs, his great beard flying in the wind, untouched by the pistol bullets with which we tried to bring him down.

How we flew down those creaking wooden stairs and out through the open door of the mill! Quick as we were, he had a good start, and by the time Gerard and I

were in the saddle he had become a tiny man upon a small horse galloping up the green slope of the opposite hill. The shades of evening, too, were drawing in, and upon his left was the huge salt-marsh, where we should have found it difficult to follow him. The chances were certainly in his favour. And yet he never swerved from his course, but kept straight on across the downs on a line which took him farther and farther from the sea. Every instant we feared to see him dart away in the morass, but still he held his horse's head against the hill-side. What could he be making for ? He never pulled rein and never glanced round, but flew onwards, like a man with a definite goal in view.

Lieutenant Gerard and I were lighter men, and our mounts were as good as his, so that it was not long before we began to gain upon him. If we could only keep him in sight it was certain that we should ride him down ; but there was always the danger that he might use his knowledge of the country to throw us off his track. As we sank beneath each hill my heart sank also, to rise again with renewed hope as we caught sight of him once more galloping in front of us.

But at last that which I had feared befell us. We were not more than a couple of hundred paces behind him when we lost all trace of him. He had vanished behind some rolling ground, and we could see nothing of him when we reached the summit.

" There is a road there to the left," cried Gerard, whose Gascon blood was aflame with excitement. " On, my friend, on, let us keep to the left ! "

" Wait a moment ! " I cried. " There is a bridle-path upon the right, and it is as likely that he took that."

" Then do you take one and I the other."

" One moment, I hear the sound of hoofs ! "

" Yes, yes, it is his horse ! "

A great black horse, which was certainly that of General Savary, had broken out suddenly through a dense tangle of brambles in front of us. The saddle was empty.

"He has found some hiding-place here amongst the brambles," I cried.

Gerard had already sprung from his horse, and was leading him through the bushes. I followed his example, and in a minute or two we made our way down a winding path into a deep chalk quarry.

"There is no sign of him!" cried Gerard. "He has escaped us."

But suddenly I had understood it all. His furious rage which the miller had described to us was caused no doubt by his learning how he came to be betrayed upon the night of his arrival. This sweetheart of his had in some way discovered it, and had let him know. His promise to deliver himself up to-morrow was in order to give him time to have his revenge upon my uncle. And now with one idea in his head he had ridden to this chalk quarry. Of course, it must be the same chalk quarry into which the underground passage of Grosbois opened, and no doubt during his treasonable meetings with my uncle he had learned the secret. Twice I hit upon the wrong spot, but at the third trial I gained the face of the cliff, made my way between it and the bushes, and found the narrow opening, which was hardly visible in the gathering darkness. During our search Savary had overtaken us on foot, so now, leaving our horses in the chalk-pit, my two companions followed me through the narrow entrance tunnel, and on into the larger and older passage beyond. We had no lights, and it was as black as pitch within, so I stumbled forward as best I might, feeling my way by keeping one hand upon the side wall, and tripping occasionally over the stones which were scattered along the path. It had seemed no very great distance when my uncle had led the way with the light, but now, what with the darkness, and what with the uncertainty and the tension of our feelings, it appeared to be a long journey, and Savary's deep voice at my elbow growled out questions as to how many more miles we were to travel in this moleheap.

"Hush!" whispered Gerard. "I hear someone in front of us."

We stood listening in breathless silence. Then far away through the darkness I heard the sound of a door creaking upon its hinges.

"On, on!" cried Savary, eagerly. "The rascal is there, sure enough. This time at least we have got him!"

But for my part I had my fears. I remembered that my uncle had opened the door which led into the castle by some secret catch. This sound which we had heard seemed to show that Toussac had also known how to open it. But suppose that he had closed it behind him. I remembered its size and the iron clampings which bound it together. It was possible that even at the last moment we might find ourselves face to face with an insuperable obstacle. On and on we hurried in the dark, and then suddenly I could have raised a shout of joy, for there in the distance was a yellow glimmer of light, only visible in contrast with the black darkness which lay between. The door was open. In his mad thirst for vengeance Toussac had never given a thought to the pursuers at his heels.

And now we need no longer grope. It was a race along the passage and up the winding stair, through the second door, and into the stone-flagged corridor of the Castle of Grosbois, with the oil-lamp still burning at the end of it. A frightful cry—a long-drawn scream of terror and of pain—rang through it as we entered.

"He is killing him! He is killing him!" cried a voice, and a woman servant rushed madly out into the passage. "Help, help; he is killing Monsieur Bernac!"

"Where is he?" shouted Savary.

"There! The library! The door with the green curtain!" Again that horrible cry rang out, dying down to a harsh croaking. It ended in a loud sharp snick, as when one cracks one's joint, but many times louder. I knew only too well what that dreadful sound portended.

We rushed together into the room, but the hardened Savary and the dare-devil hussar both recoiled in horror from the sight which met our gaze.

My uncle had been seated writing at his desk, with his back to the door, when his murderer had entered. No doubt it was at the first glance over his shoulder that he had raised the scream when he saw that terrible hairy face coming in upon him, while the second cry may have been when those great hands clutched at his head. He had never risen from his chair—perhaps he had been too paralysed by fear—and he still sat with his back to the door. But what struck the colour from our cheeks was that his head had been turned completely round, so that his horribly distorted purple face looked squarely at us from between his shoulders. Often in my dreams that thin face, with the bulging grey eyes, and the shockingly open mouth, comes to disturb me. Beside him stood Toussac, his face flushed with triumph, and his great arms folded across his chest.

"Well, my friends," said he, "you are too late, you see. I have paid my debts after all."

"Surrender!" cried Savary.

"Shoot away! Shoot away!" he cried, drumming his hands upon his breast. "You don't suppose I fear your miserable pellets, do you? Oh, you imagine you will take me alive! I'll soon knock that idea out of your heads."

In an instant he had swung a heavy chair over his head, and was rushing furiously at us. We all fired our pistols into him together, but nothing could stop that thunderbolt of a man. With the blood spurting from his wounds, he lashed madly out with his chair, but his eyesight happily failed him, and his swishing blow came down upon the corner of the table with a crash which broke it into fragments. Then with a mad bellow of rage he sprang upon Savary, tore him down to the ground, and had his hand upon his chin before Gerard and I could seize him by the arms. We were three strong men, but

he was as strong as all of us put together, for again and again he shook himself free, and again and again we got our grip upon him once more. But he was losing blood fast. Every instant his huge strength ebbed away. With a supreme effort he staggered to his feet, the three of us hanging on to him like hounds on to a bear. Then, with a shout of rage and despair which thundered through the whole castle, his knees gave way under him, and he fell in a huge inert heap upon the floor, his black beard bristling up towards the ceiling. We all stood panting round, ready to spring upon him if he should move ; but it was over. He was dead.

Savary, deadly pale, was leaning with his hand to his side against the table. It was not for nothing that those mighty arms had been thrown round him.

" I feel as if I had been hugged by a bear," said he. " Well, there is one dangerous man the less in France, and the Emperor has lost one of his enemies. And yet he was a brave man too ! "

" What a soldier he would have made ! " said Gerard thoughtfully. " What a quartermaster for the Hussars of Berchény ! He must have been a very foolish person to set his will against that of the Emperor."

I had seated myself, sick and dazed, upon the settee, for scenes of bloodshed were new to me then, and this one had been enough to shock the most hardened. Savary gave us all a little cognac from his flask, and then tearing down one of the curtains he laid it over the terrible figure of my Uncle Bernac.

" We can do nothing here," said he. " I must get back and report to the Emperor as soon as possible. But all these papers of Bernac's must be seized, for many of them bear upon this and other conspiracies." As he spoke he gathered together a number of documents which were scattered about the table—among the others a letter which lay before him upon the desk, and which he had apparently just finished at the time of Toussac's irruption.

" Hullo, what's this ? " said Savary, glancing over it.

" I fancy that our friend Bernac was a dangerous man also. ' My dear Catulle—I beg of you to send me by the very first mail another phial of the same tasteless essence which you sent three years ago. I mean the almond decoction which leaves no traces. I have particular reasons for wanting it in the course of next week, so I implore you not to delay. You may rely upon my interest with the Emperor whenever you have occasion to demand it.' "

" Addressed to a chemist in Amiens," said Savary, turning over the letter. " A poisoner then, on the top of his other virtues. I wonder for whom this essence of almonds which leaves no trace was intended."

" I wonder," said I.

After all, he was my uncle, and he was dead, so why should I say further ?

17. *The End*

GENERAL SAVARY rode straight to Pont de Briques to report to the Emperor, while Gerard returned with me to my lodgings to share a bottle of wine. I had expected to find my Cousin Sibylle there, but to my surprise there was no sign of her, nor had she left any word to tell us whither she had gone.

It was just after daybreak in the morning when I woke to find an equerry of the Emperor with his hand upon my shoulder.

" The Emperor desires to see you, Monsieur de Laval," said he.

" Where ? "

" At the Pont de Briques."

I knew that promptitude was the first requisite for those who hoped to advance themselves in his service. In ten minutes I was in the saddle, and in half an hour I was at the château. I was conducted upstairs to a room in which were the Emperor and Josephine, she reclining

upon a sofa in a charming dressing-gown of pink and lace, he striding about in his energetic fashion, dressed in the curious costume which he assumed before his official hours had begun—a white sleeping suit, red Turkish slippers, and a white bandanna handkerchief tied round his head, the whole giving him the appearance of a West Indian planter. From the strong smell of eau-de-Cologne I judged that he had just come from his bath. He was in the best of humours, and she, as usual, reflected him, so that they were two smiling faces which were turned upon me as I was announced. It was hard to believe that it was this man with the kindly expression and the genial eye who had come like an east wind into the reception-room the other night, and left a trail of wet cheeks and downcast faces wherever he had passed.

"You have made an excellent debut as aide-de-camp," said he; "Savary has told me all that has occurred, and nothing could have been better arranged. I have not time to think of such things myself, but my wife will sleep more soundly now that she knows that this Toussac is out of the way."

"Yes, yes, he was a terrible man," cried the Empress. "So was that Georges Cadoudal. They were both terrible men."

"I have my star, Josephine," said Napoleon, patting her upon the head. "I see my own career lying before me and I know exactly what I am destined to do. Nothing can harm me until my work is accomplished. The Arabs are believers in Fate, and the Arabs are in the right."

"Then why should you plan, Napoleon, if everything is to be decided by Fate?"

"Because it is fated that I should plan, you little stupid. Don't you see that that is part of Fate also, that I should have a brain which is capable of planning. I am always building behind a scaffolding, and no one can see what I am building until I have finished. I never look forward for less than two years, and I have been

busy all morning, Monsieur de Laval, in planning out the events which will occur in the autumn and winter of 1807. By the way, that good-looking cousin of yours appears to have managed this affair very cleverly. She is a very fine girl to be wasted upon such a creature as the Lucien Lesage who has been screaming for mercy for a week past. Do you not think that it is a great pity ?"

I acknowledged that I did.

"It is always so with women—ideologists, dreamers, carried away by whims and imaginings. They are like the Easterns, who cannot conceive that a man is a fine soldier unless he has a formidable presence. I could not get the Egyptians to believe that I was a greater general than Kléber, because he had the body of a porter and the head of a hairdresser. So it is with this poor creature Lesage, who will be made a hero by women because he has an oval face and the eyes of a calf. Do you imagine that if she were to see him in his true colours it would turn her against him ?"

"I am convinced of it, sire. From the little that I have seen of my cousin I am sure that no one could have a greater contempt for cowardice or for meanness."

"You speak warmly, sir. You are not by chance just a little touched yourself by this fair cousin of yours ?"

"Sire, I have already told you——"

"Ta, ta, ta, but she is across the water, and many things have happened since then."

Constant had entered the room.

"He has been admitted, sire."

"Very good. We shall move into the next room. Josephine, you shall come too, for it is your business rather than mine."

The room into which we pass·d was a long, narrow one. There were two windows at one side, but the curtains had been drawn almost across, so that the light was not very good. At the further door was Roustem the Mameluke, and beside him, with arms folded and his face sunk downwards in an attitude of shame and

contrition, there was standing the very man of whom we had been talking. He looked up with scared eyes, and started with fear when he saw the Emperor approaching him. Napoleon stood with legs apart and his hands behind his back, and looked at him long and searchingly.

"Well, my fine fellow," said he at last, "you have burned your fingers, and I do not fancy that you will come near the fire again. Or do you perhaps think of continuing with politics as a profession?"

"If your Majesty will overlook what I have done," Lesage stammered, "I shall faithfully promise you that I will be your most loyal servant until the day of my death."

"Hum!" said the Emperor, spilling a pinch of snuff over the front of his white jacket. "There is some sense in what you say, for no one makes so good a servant as the man who has had a thorough fright. But I am a very exacting master."

"I do not care what you require of me. Everything will be welcome, if you will only give me your forgiveness."

"For example," said the Emperor. "It is one of my whims that when a man enters my service I shall marry him to whom I like. Do you agree to that?"

There was a struggle upon the poet's face, and he clasped and unclasped his hands.

"May I ask, sire——?"

"You may ask nothing."

"But there are circumstances, sire——"

"There, there, that is enough!" cried the Emperor harshly, turning upon his heel. "I do not argue, I order. There is a young lady, Mademoiselle de Bergerot, for whom I desire a husband. Will you marry her, or will you return to prison?"

Again there was the struggle in the man's face, and he was silent, twitching and writhing in his indecision.

"It is enough!" cried the Emperor. "Roustem, call the guard!"

"No, no, sire, do not send me back to prison."

"The guard, Roustem!"

"I will do it, sire! I will do it! I will marry whomever you please!"

"You villain!" cried a voice, and there was Sibylle standing in the opening of the curtains at one of the windows. Her face was pale with anger and her eyes shining with scorn; the parting curtains framed her tall, slim figure, which leaned forwards in her fury of passion. She had forgotten the Emperor, the Empress, everything, in her revulsion of feeling against this craven whom she had loved.

"They told me what you were," she cried. "I would not believe them, I *could* not believe them—for I did not know that there was upon this earth a thing so contemptible. They said that they would prove it, and I defied them to do so, and now I see you as you are. Thank God that I have found you out in time! And to think that for your sake I have brought about the death of a man who was worth a hundred of you! Oh, I am rightly punished for an unwomanly act. Toussac has had his revenge."

"Enough!" said the Emperor sternly. "Constant, lead Mademoiselle Bernac into the next room. As to you, sir, I do not think that I can condemn any lady of my Court to take such a man as a husband. Suffice it that you have been shown in your true colours, and that Mademoiselle Bernac has been cured of a foolish infatuation. Roustem, remove the prisoner!"

"There, Monsieur de Laval," said the Emperor, when the wretched Lesage had been conducted from the room. "We have not done such a bad piece of work between the coffee and the breakfast. It was your idea, Josephine, and I give you credit for it. But now, De Laval, I feel that we owe you some recompense for having set the young aristocrats a good example, and for having had a share in this Toussac business. You have certainly acted very well."

" I ask no recompense, sire," said I, with an uneasy sense of what was coming.

" It is your modesty that speaks. But I have already decided upon your reward. You shall have such an allowance as will permit you to keep up a proper appearance as my aide-de-camp, and I have determined to marry you suitably to one of the ladies-in-waiting of the Empress."

My heart turned to lead within me.

" But, sire," I stammered, " this is impossible."

" Oh, you have no occasion to hesitate. The lady is of excellent family and she is not wanting in personal charm. In a word, the affair is settled, and the marriage takes place upon Thursday."

" But it is impossible, sire," I repeated.

" Impossible ! When you have been longer in my service, sir, you will understand that that is a word which I do not tolerate. I tell you that it is settled."

" My love is given to another, sire. It is not possible for me to change."

" Indeed ! " said the Emperor coldly. " If you persist in such a resolution you cannot expect to retain your place in my household."

Here was the whole structure which my ambition had planned out crumbling hopelessly about my ears. And yet what was there for me to do ?

" It is the bitterest moment of my life, sire," said I, " and yet I must be true to the promise which I have given. If I have to be a beggar by the roadside, I shall none the less marry Eugénie de Choiseul or no one."

The Empress had risen and had approached the window.

" Well, at least, before you make up your mind, Monsieur de Laval," said she, " I should certainly take a look at this lady-in-waiting of mine, whom you refuse with such indignation."

With a quick rasping of rings she drew back the curtain of the second window. A woman was standing in the

recess. She took a step forward into the room, and then —and then with a cry and a spring my arms were round her, and hers round me, and I was standing like a man in a dream, looking down into the sweet laughing eyes of my Eugénie. It was not until I had kissed her and kissed her again upon her lips, her cheeks, her hair, that I could persuade myself that she was indeed really there.

"Let us leave them," said the voice of the Empress behind me. "Come, Napoleon. It makes me sad! It reminds me too much of the old days in the Rue Chautereine."

So there is an end of my little romance, for the Emperor's plans were, as usual, carried out, and we were married upon the Thursday, as he had said. That long and all-powerful arm had plucked her out from the Kentish town, and had brought her across the Channel, in order to make sure of my allegiance, and to strengthen the Court by the presence of a De Choiseul. As to my cousin Sibylle, it shall be written some day how she married the gallant Lieutenant Gerard many years afterwards, when he had become the chief of a brigade, and one of the most noted cavalry leaders in all the armies of France. Some day also I may tell how I came back into my rightful inheritance of Grosbois, which is still darkened to me by the thought of that terrible uncle of mine, and of what happened that night when Toussac stood at bay in the library. But enough of me and of my small fortunes. You have already heard more of them, perhaps, than you care for.

As to the Emperor, some faint shadow of whom I have tried in these pages to raise before you, you have heard from history how, despairing of gaining command of the Channel, and fearing to attempt an invasion which might be cut off from behind, he abandoned the camp of Boulogne. You have heard also how, with this very army which was meant for England, he struck down Austria and Russia in one year, and Prussia in the next. From

the day that I entered his service until that on which he sailed forth over the Atlantic, never to return, I have faithfully shared his fortunes, rising with his star and sinking with it also. And yet, as I look back at my old master, I find it very difficult to say if he was a very good man or a very bad one. I only know that he was a very great one, and that the things in which he dealt were also so great that it is impossible to judge him by any ordinary standard. Let him rest silently, then, in his great red tomb at the Invalides, for the workman's work is done, and the mighty hand which moulded France and traced the lines of modern Europe has crumbled into dust. The Fates have used him, and the Fates have thrown him away, but still it lives, the memory of the little man in the grey coat, and still it moves the thoughts and actions of men. Some have written to praise and some to blame, but for my own part I have tried to do neither one nor the other, but only to tell the impression which he made upon me in those far-off days when the Army of England lay at Boulogne, and I came back once more to my Castle of Grosbois.

THE EXPLOITS OF BRIGADIER GERARD

1. *How the Brigadier came to the Castle of Gloom* [1]

YOU do very well, my friends, to treat me with some little reverence, for in honouring me you are honouring both France and yourselves. It is not merely an old, grey-moustached officer whom you see eating his omelette or draining his glass, but it is a fragment of history. In me you see one of the last of those wonderful men, the men who were veterans when they were yet boys, who learned to use a sword earlier than a razor, and who during a hundred battles had never once let the enemy see the colour of their knapsacks. For twenty years we were teaching Europe how to fight, and even when they had learned their lesson it was only the thermometer, and never the bayonet, which could break the Grand Army down. Berlin, Naples, Vienna, Madrid, Lisbon, Moscow—we stabled our horses in them all. Yes, my friends, I say again that you do well to send your children to me with flowers, for these ears have heard the trumpet calls of France, and these eyes have seen her standards in lands where they may never be seen again.

Even now, when I doze in my arm-chair, I can see those great warriors stream before me—the green-jacketed chasseurs, the giant cuirassiers, Poniatowsky's lancers, the white-mantled dragoons, the nodding bear-skins of the horse grenadiers. And then there comes the thick, low rattle of the drums, and through wreaths of dust and smoke I see the line of high bonnets, the row of brown faces, the swing and toss of the long, red plumes

[1] The term Brigadier is used throughout in its English and not in its French sense.

amid the sloping lines of steel. And there rides Ney with his red head, and Lefebvre with his bulldog jaw, and Lannes with his Gascon swagger ; and then amidst the gleam of brass and the flaunting feathers I catch a glimpse of *him*, the man with the pale smile, the rounded shoulders, and the far-off eyes. There is an end of my sleep, my friends, for up I spring from my chair, with a cracked voice calling and a silly hand outstretched, so that Madame Titaux has one more laugh at the old fellow who lives among the shadows.

Although I was a full Chief of Brigade when the wars came to an end, and had every hope of soon being made a General of Division, it is still rather to my earlier days that I turn when I wish to talk of the glories and the trials of a soldier's life. For you will understand that when an officer has so many men and horses under him, he has his mind full of recruits and remounts, fodder and farriers, and quarters, so that even when he is not in the face of the enemy, life is a very serious matter for him. But when he is only a lieutenant or a captain, he has nothing heavier than his epaulettes upon his shoulders, so that he can clink his spurs and swing his dolman, drain his glass and kiss his girl, thinking of nothing save of enjoying a gallant life. That is the time when he is likely to have adventures, and it is often to that time that I shall turn in the stories which I may have for you. So it will be to-night when I tell you of my visit to the Castle of Gloom ; of the strange mission of Sub-Lieutenant Duroc, and of the horrible affair of the man who was once known as Jean Carabin, and afterwards as the Baron Straubenthal.

You must know, then, that in the February of 1807, immediately after the taking of Danzig, Major Legendre and I were commissioned to bring four hundred remounts from Prussia into Eastern Poland.

The hard weather, and especially the great battle at Eylau, had killed so many of the horses that there was some danger of our beautiful Tenth of Hussars becoming

a battalion of light infantry. We knew, therefore, both the Major and I, that we should be very welcome at the front. We did not advance very rapidly, however, for the snow was deep, the roads detestable, and we had but twenty returning invalids to assist us. Besides, it is impossible, when you have a daily change of forage, and sometimes none at all, to move horses faster than a walk. I am aware that in the story-books the cavalry whirls past at the maddest of gallops; but for my own part, after twelve campaigns, I should be very satisfied to know that my brigade could always walk upon the march and trot in the presence of the enemy. This I say of the hussars and chasseurs, mark you, so that it is far more the case with cuirassiers or dragoons.

For myself I am fond of horses, and to have four hundred of them, of every age and shade and character, all under my own hands, was a very great pleasure to me. They were from Pomerania for the most part, though some were from Normandy and some from Alsace, and it amused us to notice that they differed in character as much as the people of those provinces. We observed also, what I have often proved since, that the nature of a horse can be told by his colour, from the coquettish light bay, full of fancies and nerves, to the hardy chestnut, and from the docile roan to the pig-headed rusty-black. All this has nothing in the world to do with my story, but how is an officer of cavalry to get on with his tale when he finds four hundred horses waiting for him at the outset? It is my habit, you see, to talk of that which interests myself and so I hope that I may interest you.

We crossed the Vistula opposite Marienwerder, and had got as far as Riesenberg, when Major Legendre came into my room in the post-house with an open paper in his hand.

"You are to leave me," said he, with despair upon his face.

It was no very great grief to me to do that, for he was,

if I may say so, hardly worthy to have such a subaltern. I saluted, however, in silence.

"It is an order from General Lasalle," he continued; "you are to proceed to Rossel instantly, and to report yourself at the headquarters of the regiment."

No message could have pleased me better. I was already very well thought of by my superior officers. It was evident to me, therefore, that this sudden order meant that the regiment was about to see service once more, and that Lasalle understood how incomplete my squadron would be without me. It is true that it came at an inconvenient moment, for the keeper of the post-house had a daughter—one of those ivory-skinned, black-haired Polish girls—with whom I had hoped to have some further talk. Still, it is not for the pawn to argue when the fingers of the player move him from the square; so down I went, saddled my big black charger, Rataplan, and set off instantly upon my lonely journey.

My word, it was a treat for those poor Poles and Jews, who have so little to brighten their dull lives, to see such a picture as that before their doors! The frosty morning air made Rataplan's great black limbs and the beautiful curves of his back and sides gleam and shimmer with every gambade. As for me, the rattle of hoofs upon a road, and the jingle of bridle chains which comes with every toss of a saucy head, would even now set my blood dancing through my veins. You may think, then, how I carried myself in my five-and-twentieth year—I, Étienne Gerard, the picked horseman and surest blade in the ten regiments of hussars. Blue was our colour in the Tenth—a sky-blue dolman and pelisse with a scarlet front—and it was said of us in the army that we could set a whole population running, the women towards us, and the men away. There were bright eyes in the Riesenberg windows that morning which seemed to beg me to tarry; but what can a soldier do, save to kiss his hand and shake his bridle as he rides upon his way?

HOW HE CAME TO THE CASTLE OF GLOOM

It was a bleak season to ride through the poorest and ugliest country in Europe, but there was a cloudless sky above, and a bright, cold sun, which shimmered on the huge snow-fields. My breath reeked into the frosty air, and Rataplan sent up two feathers of steam from his nostrils, while the icicles drooped from the side-irons of his bit. I let him trot to warm his limbs, while for my own part I had too much to think of to give much heed to the cold. To north and south stretched the great plains, mottled over with dark clumps of fir and lighter patches of larch. A few cottages peeped out here and there, but it was only three months since the Grand Army had passed that way, and you know what that meant to a country. The Poles were our friends, it was true, but out of a hundred thousand men, only the Guard had waggons, and the rest had to live as best they might. It did not surprise me, therefore, to see no signs of cattle and no smoke from the silent houses. A weal had been left across the country where the great host had passed, and it was said that even the rats were starved wherever the Emperor had led his men.

By midday I had got as far as the village of Saalfeldt, but as I was on the direct road for Osterode, where the Emperor was wintering, and also for the main camp of the seven divisions of infantry, the highway was choked with carriages and carts. What with artillery caissons and waggons and couriers, and the ever-thickening stream of recruits and stragglers, it seemed to me that it would be a very long time before I should join my comrades. The plains, however, were five feet deep in snow, so there was nothing for it but to plod upon our way. It was with joy, therefore, that I found a second road which branched away from the other, trending through a fir-wood towards the north. There was a small auberge at the cross-roads, and a patrol of the Third Hussars of Conflans —the very regiment of which I was afterwards colonel— were mounting their horses at the door. On the steps stood their officer, a slight, pale young man, who looked

more like a young priest from a seminary than a leader of the devil-may-care rascals before him.

"Good-day, sir," said he, seeing that I pulled up my horse.

"Good-day," I answered. "I am Lieutenant Étienne Gerard, of the Tenth."

I could see by his face that he had heard of me. Every-body had heard of me since my duel with the six fencing masters. My manner, however, served to put him at his ease with me.

"I am Sub-Lieutenant Duroc, of the Third," said he.

"Newly joined?" I asked.

"Last week."

I had thought as much, from his white face and from the way in which he let his men lounge upon their horses. It was not so long, however, since I had learned myself what it was like when a schoolboy has to give orders to veteran troopers. It made me blush, I remember, to shout abrupt commands to men who had seen more battles than I had years, and it would have come more natural for me to say, "With your permission, we shall now wheel into line," or, "If you think it best, we shall trot." I did not think the less of the lad, therefore, when I observed that his men were somewhat out of hand, but I gave them a glance which stiffened them in their saddles.

"May I ask, monsieur, whether you are going by this northern road?" I asked.

"My orders are to patrol it as far as Arensdorf," said he.

"Then I will, with your permission, ride so far with you," said I. "It is very clear that the longer way will be the faster."

So it proved, for this road led away from the army into a country which was given over to Cossacks and marauders, and it was as bare as the other was crowded. Duroc and I rode in front, with our six troopers clattering in the rear. He was a good boy, this Duroc, with his head full of the nonsense that they teach at St. Cyr, knowing more

about Alexander and Pompey than how to mix a horse's fodder or care for a horse's feet. Still, he was, as I have said, a good boy, unspoiled as yet by the camp. It pleased me to hear him prattle away about his sister Marie and about his mother in Amiens. Presently we found ourselves at the village of Hayenau. Duroc rode up to the post-house and asked to see the master.

"Can you tell me," said he, "whether the man who calls himself the Baron Straubenthal lives in these parts?"

The postmaster shook his head, and we rode upon our way. I took no notice of this, but when, at the next village, my comrade repeated the same question, with the same result, I could not help asking him who this Baron Straubenthal might be.

"He is a man," said Duroc, with a sudden flush upon his boyish face, "to whom I have a very important message to convey."

Well, this was not satisfactory, but there was something in my companion's manner which told me that any further questioning would be distasteful to him. I said nothing more, therefore, but Duroc would still ask every peasant whom we met whether he could give him any news of the Baron Straubenthal.

For my own part I was endeavouring, as an officer of light cavalry should, to form an idea of the lay of the country, to note the course of the streams, and to mark the places where there should be fords. Every step was taking us farther from the camp round the flanks of which we were travelling. Far to the south a few plumes of grey smoke in the frosty air marked the position of some of our outposts. To the north, however, there was nothing between ourselves and the Russian winter quarters. Twice on the extreme horizon I caught a glimpse of the glitter of steel, and pointed it out to my companion. It was too distant for us to tell whence it came, but we had little doubt that it was from the lance-heads of marauding Cossacks.

The sun was just setting when we rode over a low hill

and saw a small village upon our right, and on our left a high black castle, which jutted out from amongst the pine-woods. A farmer with his cart was approaching us—a matted-haired, downcast fellow, in a sheepskin jacket.

"What village is this?" asked Duroc.

"It is Arensdorf," he answered, in his barbarous German dialect.

"Then here I am to stay the night," said my young companion. Then, turning to the farmer, he asked his eternal question, "Can you tell me where the Baron Straubenthal lives?"

"Why, it is he who owns the Castle of Gloom," said the farmer, pointing to the dark turrets over the distant fir forest.

Duroc gave a shout like the sportsman who sees his game rising in front of him. The lad seemed to have gone off his head—his eyes shining, his face deathly white, and such a grim set about his mouth as made the farmer shrink away from him. I can see him now, leaning forward on his brown horse, with his eager gaze fixed upon the great black tower.

"Why do you call it the Castle of Gloom?" I asked.

"Well, it's the name it bears upon the country-side," said the farmer. "By all accounts there have been some black doings up yonder. It's not for nothing that the wickedest man in Poland has been living there these fourteen years past."

"A Polish nobleman?" I asked.

"Nay, we breed no such men in Poland," he answered.

"A Frenchman, then?" cried Duroc.

"They say that he came from France."

"And with red hair?"

"As red as a fox."

"Yes, yes, it is my man," cried my companion, quivering all over in his excitement. "It is the hand of Providence which has led me here. Who can say that there is not justice in this world? Come, Monsieur

Gerard, for I must see the men safely quartered before I can attend to this private matter."

He spurred on his horse, and ten minutes later we were at the door of the inn of Arensdorf, where his men were to find their quarters for the night.

Well, all this was no affair of mine, and I could not imagine what the meaning of it might be. Rossel was still far off, but I determined to ride on for a few hours and take my chance of some wayside barn in which I could find shelter for Rataplan and myself. I had mounted my horse, therefore, after tossing off a cup of wine, when young Duroc came running out of the door and laid his hand upon my knee.

"Monsieur Gerard," he panted, "I beg of you not to abandon me like this!"

"My good sir," said I, "if you would tell me what is the matter and what you would wish me to do, I should be better able to tell you if I could be of any assistance to you."

"You can be of the very greatest," he cried. "Indeed, from all that I have heard of you, Monsieur Gerard, you are the one man whom I should wish to have by my side to-night."

"You forget that I am riding to join my regiment."

"You cannot, in any case, reach it to-night. To-morrow will bring you to Rossel. By staying with me you will confer the very greatest kindness upon me, and you will aid me in a matter which concerns my own honour and the honour of my family. I am compelled, however, to confess to you that some personal danger may possibly be involved."

It was a crafty thing for him to say. Of course, I sprang from Rataplan's back and ordered the groom to lead him back into the stables.

"Come into the inn," said I, "and let me know exactly what it is that you wish me to do."

He led the way into a sitting-room, and fastened the door lest we should be interrupted. He was a well-

grown lad, and as he stood in the glare of the lamp, with the light beating upon his earnest face and upon his uniform of silver grey, which suited him to a marvel, I felt my heart warm towards him. Without going so far as to say that he carried himself as I had done at his age, there was at least similarity enough to make me feel in sympathy with him.

"I can explain it all in a few words," said he. "If I have not already satisfied your very natural curiosity, it is because the subject is so painful a one to me that I can hardly bring myself to allude to it. I cannot, however, ask for your assistance without explaining to you exactly how the matter lies.

"You must know, then, that my father was the well-known banker, Christophe Duroc, who was murdered by the people during the September massacres. As you are aware, the mob took possession of the prisons, chose three so-called judges to pass sentence upon the unhappy aristocrats, and then tore them to pieces when they were passed out into the street. My father had been a benefactor of the poor all his life. There were many to plead for him. He had the fever, too, and was carried in, half-dead, upon a blanket. Two of the judges were in favour of acquitting him; the third, a young Jacobin, whose huge body and brutal mind had made him a leader among these wretches, dragged him, with his own hands, from the litter, kicked him again and again with his heavy boots, and hurled him out of the door, where in an instant he was torn limb from limb under circumstances which are too horrible for me to describe. This, as you perceive, was murder, even under their own unlawful laws, for two of their own judges had pronounced in my father's favour.

"Well, when the days of order came back again, my elder brother began to make inquiries about this man. I was only a child then, but it was a family matter, and it was discussed in my presence. The fellow's name was Carabin. He was one of Sansterre's Guard, and a noted

duellist. A foreign lady named the Baroness Straubenthal having been dragged before the Jacobins, he had gained her liberty for her on the promise that she with her money and estates should be his. He had married her, taken her name and title, and escaped out of France at the time of the fall of Robespierre. What had become of him we had no means of learning.

"You will think, doubtless, that it would be easy for us to find him, since we had both his name and his title. You must remember, however, that the Revolution left us without money, and that without money such a search is very difficult. Then came the Empire, and it became more difficult still, for, as you are aware, the Emperor considered that the 18th Brumaire brought all accounts to a settlement, and that on that day a veil had been drawn across the past. None the less, we kept our own family story and our own family plans.

"My brother joined the army, and passed with it through all Southern Europe, asking everywhere for the Baron Straubenthal. Last October he was killed at Jena, with his mission still unfulfilled. Then it became my turn, and I have the good fortune to hear of the very man of whom I am in search at one of the first Polish villages which I have to visit, and within a fortnight of joining my regiment. And then, to make the matter even better, I find myself in the company of one whose name is never mentioned throughout the army save in connection with some daring and generous deed."

This was all very well, and I listened to it with the greatest interest, but I was none the clearer as to what young Duroc wished me to do.

"How can I be of service to you?" I asked.

"By coming up with me."

"To the Castle?"

"Precisely."

"When?"

"At once."

"But what do you intend to do?"

"I shall know what to do. But I wish you to be with me, all the same."

Well, it was never in my nature to refuse an adventure, and, besides, I had every sympathy with the lad's feelings. It is very well to forgive one's enemies, but one wishes to give them something to forgive also. I held out my hand to him, therefore.

"I must be on my way for Rossel to-morrow morning, but to-night I am yours," said I.

We left our troopers in snug quarters, and, as it was but a mile to the Castle, we did not disturb our horses. To tell the truth, I hate to see a cavalry man walk, and I hold that just as he is the most gallant thing upon earth when he has his saddle-flaps between his knees, so he is the most clumsy when he has to loop up his sabre and his sabre-tasche in one hand and turn in his toes for fear of catching the rowels of his spurs. Still, Duroc and I were of the age when one can carry things off, and I dare swear that no woman at least would have quarrelled with the appearance of the two young hussars, one in blue and one in grey, who set out that night from the Arensdorf post-house. We both carried our swords, and for my own part I slipped a pistol from my holster into the inside of my pelisse, for it seemed to me that there might be some wild work before us.

The track which led to the castle wound through a pitch-black fir-wood, where we could see nothing save the ragged patch of stars above our heads. Presently, however, it opened up, and there was the Castle right in front of us, about as far as a carbine would carry. It was a huge, uncouth place, and bore every mark of being exceedingly old, with turrets at every corner, and a square keep on the side which was nearest to us. In all its great shadow there was no sign of light save from a single window, and no sound came from it. To me there was something awful in its size and its silence, which corresponded so well with its sinister name. My companion

pressed on eagerly, and I followed him along the ill-kept path which led to the gate.

There was no bell or knocker upon the great iron-studded door, and it was only by pounding with the hilts of our sabres that we could attract attention. A thin, hawk-faced man, with a beard up to his temples, opened it at last. He carried a lantern in one hand, and in the other a chain which held an enormous black hound. His manner at the first moment was threatening, but the sight of our uniforms and of our faces turned it into one of sulky reserve.

"The Baron Straubenthal does not receive visitors at so late an hour," said he, speaking in very excellent French.

"You can inform Baron Straubenthal that I have come eight hundred leagues to see him, and that I'll not leave until I have done so," said my companion. I could not myself have said it with a better voice and manner.

The fellow took a sidelong look at us, and tugged at his black beard in his perplexity.

"To tell the truth, gentlemen," said he, "the Baron has a cup or two of wine in him at this hour, and you would certainly find him a more entertaining companion if you were to come again in the morning."

He had opened the door a little wider as he spoke, and I saw by the light of the lamp in the hall behind him that three other rough fellows were standing there, one of whom held another of these monstrous hounds. Duroc must have seen it also, but it made no difference to his resolution.

"Enough talk," said he, pushing the man to one side. "It is with your master that I have to deal."

The fellows in the hall made way for him as he strode in among them, so great is the power of one man who knows what he wants over several who are not sure of themselves. My companion tapped one of them upon the shoulder with as much assurance as though he owned him.

"Show me to the Baron," said he.

The man shrugged his shoulders, and answered something in Polish. The fellow with the beard, who had shut and barred the front door, appeared to be the only one among them who could speak French.

"Well, you shall have your way," said he, with a sinister smile. "You shall see the Baron. And perhaps, before you have finished, you will wish that you had taken my advice."

We followed him down the hall, which was stone-flagged and very spacious, with skins scattered upon the floor, and the heads of wild beasts upon the walls. At the father end he threw open a door, and we entered.

It was a small room, scantily furnished, with the same marks of neglect and decay which met us at every turn. The walls were hung with discoloured tapestry, which had come loose at one corner, so as to expose the rough stonework behind. A second door, hung with a curtain, faced us upon the other side. Between lay a square table, strewn with dirty dishes and the sordid remains of a meal. Several bottles were scattered over it. At the head of it, and facing us, there sat a huge man with a lion-like head and a great shock of orange-coloured hair. His beard was of the same glaring hue; matted and tangled and coarse as a horse's mane. I have seen some strange faces in my time, but never one more brutal than that, with its small, vicious, blue eyes, its white, crumpled cheeks, and the thick, hanging lip which protruded over his monstrous beard. His head swayed about on his shoulders, and he looked at us with the vague, dim gaze of a drunken man. Yet he was not so drunk but that our uniforms carried their message to him.

"Well, my brave boys," he hiccoughed. "What is the latest news from Paris, eh? You're going to free Poland, I hear, and have meantime all become slaves yourselves—slaves to a little aristocrat with his grey coat and his three-cornered hat. No more citizens either, I am told, and nothing but monsieur and madame. My

faith, some more heads will have to roll into the sawdust basket some of these mornings."

Duroc advanced in silence, and stood by the ruffian's side.

" Jean Carabin," said he.

The Baron started, and the film of drunkenness seemed to be clearing from his eyes.

" Jean Carabin," said Duroc, once more.

He sat up and grasped the arms of his chair.

" What do you mean by repeating that name, young man ? " he asked.

" Jean Carabin, you are a man whom I have long wished to meet."

" Supposing that I once had such a name, how can it concern you, since you must have been a child when I bore it ? "

" My name is Duroc."

" Not the son of—— ? "

" The son of the man you murdered.

The Baron tried to laugh, but there was terror in his eyes.

" We must let bygones be bygones, young man," he cried. " It was our life or theirs in those days : the aristocrats or the people. Your father was of the Gironde. He fell. I was of the mountain. Most of my comrades fell. It was all the fortune of war. We must forget all this and learn to know each other better, you and I." He held out a red, twitching hand as he spoke.

" Enough," said young Duroc. " If I were to pass my sabre through you as you sit in that chair, I should do what is just and right. I dishonour my blade by crossing it with yours. And yet you are a Frenchman, and have even held a commission under the same flag as myself. Rise, then, and defend yourself ! "

" Tut, tut ! " cried the Baron. " It is all very well for you young bloods——"

Duroc's patience could stand no more. He swung his open hand into the centre of the great orange beard.

I saw a lip fringed with blood, and two glaring blue eyes above it.

"You shall die for that blow."

"That is better," said Duroc.

"My sabre!" cried the other. "I will not keep you waiting, I promise you!" and he hurried from the room.

I have said that there was a second door covered with a curtain. Hardly had the Baron vanished when there ran from behind it a woman, young and beautiful. So swiftly and noiselessly did she move that she was between us in an instant, and it was only the shaking curtains which told us whence she had come.

"I have seen it all," she cried. "Oh, sir, you have carried yourself splendidly." She stooped to my companion's hand, and kissed it again and again ere he could disengage it from her grasp.

"Nay, madame, why should you kiss my hand?" he cried.

"Because it is the hand which struck him on his vile, lying mouth. Because it may be the hand which will avenge my mother. I am his step-daughter. The woman whose heart he broke was my mother. I loathe him, I fear him. Ah, there is his step!" In an instant she had vanished as suddenly as she had come. A moment later, the Baron entered with a drawn sword in his hand, and the fellow who had admitted us at his heels.

"This is my secretary," said he. "He will be my friend in this affair. But we shall need more elbow-room than we can find here. Perhaps you will kindly come with me to a more spacious apartment."

It was evidently impossible to fight in a chamber which was blocked by a great table. We followed him out, therefore, into the dimly-lit hall. At the farther end a light was shining through an open door.

"We shall find what we want in here," said the man with the dark beard. It was a large, empty room, with rows of barrels and cases round the walls. A strong lamp stood upon a shelf in the corner. The floor was

level and true, so that no swordsman could ask for more. Duroc drew his sabre and sprang into it. The Baron stood back with a bow and motioned me to follow my companion. Hardly were my heels over the threshold when the heavy door crashed behind us and the key screamed in the lock. We were taken in a trap.

For a moment we could not realise it. Such incredible baseness was outside all our experiences. Then, as we understood how foolish we had been to trust for an instant a man with such a history, a flush of rage came over us, rage against his villainy and against our own stupidity. We rushed at the door together, beating it with our fists and kicking with our heavy boots. The sound of our blows and of our execrations must have resounded through the Castle. We called to this villain, hurling at him every name which might pierce even into his hardened soul. But the door was enormous—such a door as one finds in mediæval castles—made of huge beams clamped together with iron. It was as easy to break as a square of the Old Guard. And our cries appeared to be of as little avail as our blows, for they only brought for answer the clattering echoes from the high roof above is. When you have done some soldiering, you soon learn to put up with what cannot be altered. It was I, then, who first recovered my calmness, and prevailed upon Duroc to join with me in examining the apartment which had become our dungeon.

There was only one window, which had no glass in it, and was so narrow that one could not so much as get one's head through. It was high up, and Duroc had to stand upon a barrel in order to see from it.

"What can you see?" I asked.

"Fir-woods and an avenue of snow between them," said he. "Ah!" he gave a cry of surprise.

I sprang upon the barrel beside him. There was, as he said, a long, clear strip of snow in front. A man was riding down it, flogging his horse and galloping like a madman. As we watched, he grew smaller and smaller,

until he was swallowed up by the black shadows of the forest.

"What does that mean?" asked Duroc.

"No good for us," said I. "He may have gone for some brigands to cut our throats. Let us see if we cannot find a way out of this mouse-trap before the cat can arrive."

The one piece of good fortune in our favour was that beautiful lamp. It was nearly full of oil, and would last us until morning. In the dark our situation would have been far more difficult. By its light we proceeded to examine the packages and cases which lined the walls. In some places there was only a single line of them, while in one corner they were piled nearly to the ceiling. It seemed that we were in the storehouse of the Castle, for there were a great number of cheeses, vegetables of various kinds, bins full of dried fruits, and a line of wine barrels. One of these had a spigot in it, and as I had eaten little during the day, I was glad of a cup of claret, and some food. As to Duroc, he would take nothing, but paced up and down the room in a fever of anger and impatience. "I'll have him yet!" he cried, every now and then. "The rascal shall not escape me!"

This was all very well, but it seemed to me, as I sat on a great round cheese eating my supper, that this youngster was thinking rather too much of his own family affairs and too little of the fine scrape into which he had got me. After all, his father had been dead fourteen years, and nothing could set that right; but here was Étienne Gerard, the most dashing lieutenant in the whole Grand Army, in imminent danger of being cut off at the very outset of his brilliant career. Who was ever to know the heights to which I might have risen if I were knocked on the head in this hole-and-corner business, which had nothing whatever to do with France or the Emperor? I could not help thinking what a fool I had been, when I had a fine war before me and everything which a man could desire, to go off on a hare-brained expedition of

this sort, as if it were not enough to have a quarter of a million Russians to fight against, without plunging into all sorts of private quarrels as well.

"That is all very well," I said at last, as I heard Duroc muttering his threats. "You may do what you like to him when you get the upper hand. At present the question rather is, what is *he* going to do to us?"

"Let him do his worst!" cried the boy. "I owe a duty to my father."

"That is mere foolishness," said I. "If you owe a duty to your father, I owe one to my mother, which is to get out of this business safe and sound."

My remark brought him to his senses.

"I have thought too much of myself!" he cried. "Forgive me, Monsieur Gerard. Give me your advice as to what I should do."

"Well," said I, "it is not for our health that they have shut us up here among the cheeses. They mean to make an end of us if they can. That is certain. They hope that no one knows that we have come here, and that none will trace us if we remain. Do your hussars know where you have gone to?"

"I said nothing."

"Hum! It is clear that we cannot be starved here. They must come to us if they are to kill us. Behind a barricade of barrels we could hold our own against the five rascals whom we have seen. That is, probably, why they have sent that messenger for assistance."

"We must get out before he returns."

"Precisely, if we are to get out at all."

"Could we not burn down this door?" he cried.

"Nothing could be easier," said I. "There are several casks of oil in the corner. My only objection is that we should ourselves be nicely toasted, like two little oyster pâtés."

."Can you not suggest something?" he cried, in despair. "Ah, what is that?"

There had been a low sound at our little window, and

a shadow came between the stars and ourselves. A small, white hand was stretched into the lamplight. Something glittered between the fingers.

"Quick! quick!" cried a woman's voice.

We were on the barrel in an instant.

"They have sent for the Cossacks. Your lives are at stake. Ah, I am lost! I am lost!"

There was the sound of rushing steps, a hoarse oath, a blow, and the stars were once more twinkling through the window. We stood helpless upon the barrel with our blood cold with horror. Half a minute afterwards we heard a smothered scream, ending in a choke. A great door slammed somewhere in the silent night.

"Those ruffians have seized her. They will kill her," I cried.

Duroc sprang down with the inarticulate shouts of one whose reason has left him. He struck the door so frantically with his naked hands that he left a blotch of blood with every blow.

"Here is the key!" I shouted, picking one from the floor. "She must have thrown it in at the instant that she was torn away."

My companion snatched it from me with a shriek of joy. A moment later he dashed it down upon the boards. It was so small that it was lost in the enormous lock. Duroc sank upon one of the boxes with his head between his hands. He sobbed in his despair. I could have sobbed, too, when I thought of the woman and how helpless we were to save her.

But I am not easily baffled. After all, this key must have been sent to us for a purpose. The lady could not bring us that of the door, because this murderous step-father of hers would most certainly have it in his pocket. Yet this other must have a meaning, or why should she risk her life to place it in our hands? It would say little for our wits if we could not find out what that meaning might be.

I set to work moving all the cases out from the wall,

and Duroc, gaining new hope from my courage, helped me with all his strength. It was no light task, for many of them were large and heavy. On we went, working like maniacs, slinging barrels, cheeses and boxes pell-mell into the middle of the room. At last there only remained one huge barrel of vodki, which stood in the corner. With our united strength we rolled it out, and there was a little low wooden door in the wainscot behind it. The key fitted, and with a cry of delight we saw it swing open before us. With the lamp in my hand, I squeezed my way in, followed by my companion.

We were in the powder-magazine of the Castle—a rough, walled cellar, with barrels all round it, and one with the top staved in in the centre. The powder from it lay in a black heap upon the floor. Beyond there was another door, but it was locked.

"We are no better off than before," cried Duroc. "We have no key."

"We have a dozen!" I cried.

"Where?"

I pointed to the line of powder barrels.

"You would blow this door open?"

"Precisely."

"But you would explode the magazine."

It was true, but I was not at the end of my resources.

"We will blow open the store-room door," I cried.

I ran back and seized a tin box which had been filled with candles. It was about the size of my busby—large enough to hold several pounds of powder. Duroc filled it while I cut off the end of a candle. When we had finished, it would have puzzled a colonel of engineers to make a better petard. I put three cheeses on the top of each other and placed it above them, so as to lean against the lock. Then we lit our candle-end and ran for shelter, shutting the door of the magazine behind us.

It is no joke, my friends, to be among all those tons of powder, with the knowledge that if the flame of the ex-

plosion should penetrate through one thin door our blackened limbs would be shot higher than the Castle keep. Who could have believed that a half-inch of candle could take so long to burn ? My ears were straining all the time for the thudding of the hoofs of the Cossacks who were coming to destroy us. I had almost made up my mind that the candle must have gone out when there was a smack like a bursting bomb, our door flew to bits, and pieces of cheese, with a shower of turnips, apples, and splinters of cases, were shot in among us. As we rushed out we had to stagger through an impenetrable smoke, with all sorts of débris beneath our feet, but there was a glimmering square where the dark door had been. The petard had done its work.

In fact, it had done more for us than we had even ventured to hope. It had shattered gaolers as well as gaol. The first thing that I saw as I came out into the hall was a man with a butcher's axe in his hand, lying flat upon his back, with a gaping wound across his forehead. The second was a huge dog, with two of its legs broken, twisting in agony upon the floor. As it raised itself up I saw the two broken ends flapping like flails. At the same instant I heard a cry, and there was Duroc, thrown against the wall, with the other hound's teeth in his throat. He pushed it off with his left hand, while again and again he passed his sabre through its body, but it was not until I blew out its brains with my pistol that the iron jaws relaxed, and the fierce, bloodshot eyes were glazed in death.

There was no time for us to pause. A woman's scream from in front—a scream of mortal terror—told us that even now we might be too late. There were two other men in the hall, but they cowered away from our drawn swords and furious faces. The blood was streaming from Duroc's neck and dyeing the grey fur of his pelisse. Such was the lad's fire, however, that he shot in front of me, and it was only over his shoulder that I caught a glimpse of the scene as we rushed into the cham-

ber in which we had first seen the master of the Castle of Gloom.

The Baron was standing in the middle of the room, with his tangled mane bristling like an angry lion. He was, as I have said, a huge man with enormous shoulders ; and as he stood there, with his face flushed with rage and his sword advanced, I could not but think that, in spite of all his villainies, he had a proper figure for a grenadier. The lady lay cowering in a chair behind him. A weal across one of her white arms and a dog-whip upon the floor were enough to show that our escape had hardly been in time to save her from his brutality. He gave a howl like a wolf as we broke in, and was upon us in an instant, hacking and driving, with a curse at every blow.

I have already said that the room gave no space for swordsmanship. My young companion was in front of me in the narrow passage between the table and the wall, so that I could only look on without being able to aid him. The lad knew something of his weapon, and was as fierce and active as a wild cat, but in so narrow a space the weight and strength of the giant gave him the advantage. Besides, he was an admirable swordsman. His parade and riposte were as quick as lightning. Twice he touched Duroc upon the shoulder, and then, as the lad slipped on a lunge, he whirled up his sword to finish him before he could recover his feet. I was quicker than he, however, and took the cut upon the pommel of my sabre.

" Excuse me," said I, " but you have still to deal with Étienne Gerard."

He drew back and leaned against the tapestry-covered wall, breathing in little, hoarse gasps, for his foul living was against him.

" Take your breath," said I. " I will await your convenience."

" You have no cause of quarrel against me," he panted.

" I owe you some little attention," said I, " for having shut me up in your store-room. Besides, if all other

were wanting, I see cause enough upon that lady's arm."

"Have your way, then!" he snarled, and leaped at me like a madman. For a minute I saw only the blazing blue eyes, and the red glazed point which stabbed and stabbed, rasping off to right or to left, and yet ever back at my throat and my breast. I had never thought that such good sword-play was to be found at Paris in the days of the Revolution. I do not suppose that in all my little affairs I have met six men who had a better knowledge of their weapon. But he knew that I was his master. He read death in my eyes, and I could see that he read it. The flush died from his face. His breath came in shorter and in thicker gasps. Yet he fought on, even after the final thrust had come, and died still hacking and cursing, with foul cries upon his lips, and his blood clotting upon his orange beard. I who speak to you have seen so many battles, that my old memory can scarce contain their names, and yet of all the terrible sights which these eyes have rested upon, there is none which I care to think of less than of that orange beard with the crimson stain in the centre, from which I had drawn my sword-point.

It was only afterwards that I had time to think of all this. His monstrous body had hardly crashed down upon the floor, before the woman in the corner sprang to her feet, clapping her hands together and screaming out in her delight. For my part I was disgusted to see a woman take such delight in a deed of blood, and I gave no thought as to the terrible wrongs which must have befallen her before she could so far forget the gentleness of her sex. It was on my tongue to tell her sharply to be silent, when a strange, choking smell took the breath from my nostrils, and a sudden, yellow glare brought out the figures upon the faded hangings.

"Duroc, Duroc!" I shouted, tugging at his shoulder. "The Castle is on fire!"

The boy lay senseless upon the ground exhausted by his wounds. I rushed out into the hall to see whence

the danger came. It was our explosion which had set alight to the dry framework of the door. Inside the store-room some of the boxes were already blazing. I glanced in, and as I did so my blood was turned to water by the sight of the powder barrels beyond, and of the loose heap upon the floor. It might be seconds, it could not be more than minutes, before the flames would be at the edge of it. These eyes will be closed in death, my friends, before they cease to see those crawling lines of fire and the black heap beyond.

How little I can remember what followed. Vaguely I can recall how I rushed into the chamber of death, how I seized Duroc by one limp hand and dragged him down the hall, the woman keeping pace with me and pulling at the other arm. Out of the gateway we rushed, and on down the snow-covered path until we were on the fringe of the fir forest. It was at that moment that I heard a crash behind me, and, glancing round, saw a great spout of fire shoot up into the wintry sky. An instant later there seemed to come a second crash, far louder than the first. I saw the fir trees and the stars whirling round me and I fell unconscious across the body of my comrade.

It was some weeks before I came to myself in the post-house of Arensdorf, and longer still before I could be told all that had befallen me. It was Duroc, already able to go soldiering, who came to my bedside and gave me an account of it. He it was who told me how a piece of timber had struck me on the head and laid me almost dead upon the ground. From him, too, I learned how the Polish girl had run to Arensdorf, how she had roused our hussars, and how she had only just brought them back in time to save us from the spears of the Cossacks who had been summoned from their bivouac by that same black-bearded secretary whom we had seen galloping so swiftly over the snow. As to the brave lady who had twice saved our lives, I could not learn very much about

her at that moment from Duroc, but when I chanced to meet him in Paris two years later, after the campaign of Wagram, I was not very much surprised to find that I needed no introduction to his bride, and that by the queer turns of fortune he had himself, had he chosen to use it, that very name and title of the Baron Straubenthal, which showed him to be the owner of the blackened ruins of the Castle of Gloom.

2. *How the Brigadier slew the Brothers of Ajaccio*

WHEN the Emperor needed an agent he was always very ready to do me the honour of recalling the name of Étienne Gerard, though it occasionally escaped him when rewards were to be distributed. Still, I was a colonel at twenty-eight, and the chief of a brigade at thirty-one, so that I have no reason to be dissatisfied with my career. Had the wars lasted another two or three years I might have grasped my bâton, and the man who had his hand upon that was only one stride from a throne. Murat had changed his hussar's cap for a crown, and another light cavalry man might have done as much. However, all those dreams were driven away by Waterloo, and, although I was not able to write my name upon history, it is sufficiently well known by all who served with me in the great wars of the Empire.

What I want to tell you to-night is about the very singular affair which first started me upon my rapid upward course, and which had the effect of establishing a secret bond between the Emperor and myself.

There is just one little word of warning which I must give you before I begin. When you hear me speak, you must always bear in mind that you are listening to one who has seen history from the inside. I am talking about what my ears have heard and my eyes have seen,

so you must not try to confute me by quoting the opinions of some student or man of the pen, who has written a book of history or memoirs. There is much which is unknown by such people, and much which never will be known by the world. For my own part, I could tell you some very surprising things were it discreet to do so. The facts which I am about to relate to you to-night were kept secret by me during the Emperor's life-time, because I gave him my promise that it should be so, but I do not think that there can be any harm now in my telling the remarkable part which I played.

You must know, then, that at the time of the Treaty of Tilsit I was a simple lieutenant in the 10th Hussars, without money or interest. It is true that my appearance and my gallantry were in my favour, and that I had already won a reputation as being one of the best swordsmen in the army; but among the host of brave men who surrounded the Emperor it needed more than this to ensure a rapid career. I was confident, however, that my chance would come, though I never dreamed that it would take so remarkable a form.

When the Emperor returned to Paris, after the declaration of peace in the year 1807, he spent much of his time with the Empress and the Court at Fontainebleau. It was the time when he was at the pinnacle of his career. He had in three successive campaigns humbled Austria, crushed Prussia, and made the Russians very glad to get upon the right side of the Niemen. The old Bulldog over the Channel was still growling, but he could not get very far from his kennel. If we could have made a perpetual peace at that moment, France would have taken a higher place than any nation since the days of the Romans. So I have heard the wise folk say, though for my part I had other things to think of. All the girls were glad to see the army back after its long absence, and you may be sure that I had my share of any favours that were going. You may judge how far I was a favourite in those days when I say that even now, in my sixtieth year——

But why should I dwell upon that which is already sufficiently well known ?

Our regiment of hussars was quartered with the horse chasseurs of the guard at Fontainebleau. It is, as you know, but a little place, buried in the heart of the forest, and it was wonderful at this time to see it crowded with Grand Dukes and Electors and Princes, who thronged round Napoleon like puppies round their master, each hoping that some bone might be thrown to him. There was more German than French to be heard in the street, for those who had helped us in the late war had come to beg for a reward, and those who had opposed us had come to try and escape their punishment.

And all the time our little man, with his pale face and his cold, grey eyes, was riding to the hunt every morning, silent and brooding, all of them following in his train, in the hope that some word would escape him. And then, when the humour seized him, he would throw a hundred square miles to that man, or tear as much off the other, round off one kingdom by a river, or cut off another by a chain of mountains. That was how he used to do business, this little artilleryman, whom we had raised so high with our sabres and our bayonets. He was very civil to us always, for he knew where his power came from. We knew also, and showed it by the way in which we carried ourselves. We were agreed, you understand, that he was the finest leader in the world, but we did not forget that he had the finest men to lead.

Well, one day I was seated in my quarters playing cards with young Morat, of the horse chasseurs, when the door opened and in walked Lasalle, who was our Colonel. You know what a fine, swaggering fellow he was, and the sky-blue uniform of the Tenth suited him to a marvel. My faith, we youngsters were so taken by him that we all swore and diced and drank and played the deuce whether we liked it or no, just that we might resemble our Colonel ! We forgot that it was not because he drank or gambled that the Emperor was going to make him the head of the

light cavalry, but because he had the surest eye for the nature of a position or for the strength of a column, and the best judgment as to when infantry could be broken, or whether guns were exposed, of any man in the army. We were too young to understand all that, however, so we waxed our moustaches and clinked our spurs and let the ferrules of our scabbards wear out by trailing them along the pavement in the hope that we should all become Lasalles. When he came clanking into my quarters, both Morat and I sprang to our feet.

" My boy," said he, clapping me on the shoulder, " the Emperor wants to see you at four o'clock."

The room whirled round me at the words, and I had to lean my hands upon the edge of the card-table.

" What ? " I cried. " The Emperor ! "

" Precisely," said he, smiling at my astonishment.

" But the Emperor does not know of my existence, Colonel," I protested. " Why should he send for me ? "

" Well, that's just what puzzles me," cried Lasalle, twirling his moustache. " If he wanted the help of a good sabre, why should he descend to one of my lieutenants when he might have found all that he needed at the head of the regiment ? However," he added, clapping me on the shoulder again in his hearty fashion, " every man has his chance. I have had mine, otherwise I should not be Colonel of the Tenth. I must not grudge you yours. Forwards, my boy, and may it be the first step towards changing your busby for a cocked hat."

Itwas but two o'clock, so he left me,promising to come back and to accompany me to the palace. My faith, what a time I passed, and how many conjectures did I make as to what it was that the Emperor could want of me ! I paced up and down my little room in a fever of anticipation. Sometimes I thought that perhaps he had heard of the guns which we had taken at Austerlitz ; but then, there were so many who had taken guns at Austerlitz, and two years had passed since the battle. Or it might be that he wished to reward me for my affair with

the aide-de-camp of the Russian Emperor. But then again a cold fit would seize me, and I would fancy that he had sent for me to reprimand me. There were a few duels which he might have taken in ill part, and there were one or two little jokes in Paris since the peace.

But, no! I considered the words of Lasalle. "If he had need of a brave man," said Lasalle.

It was obvious that my Colonel had some idea of what was in the wind. If he had not known that it was to my advantage, he would not have been so cruel as to congratulate me. My heart glowed with joy as this conviction grew upon me, and I sat down to write to my mother and to tell her that the Emperor was waiting, at that very moment, to have my opinion upon a matter of importance. It made me smile as I wrote it to think that, wonderful as it appeared to me, it would probably only confirm my mother in her opinion of the Emperor's good sense.

At half-past three I heard a sabre come clanking against every step of my wooden stair. It was Lasalle, and with him was a lame gentleman, very neatly dressed in black with dapper ruffles and cuffs. We did not know many civilians, we of the army, but, my word, this was one whom we could not afford to ignore! I had only to glance at those twinkling eyes, the comical, upturned nose, and the straight, precise mouth, to know that I was in the presence of the one man in France whom even the Emperor had to consider.

"This is Monsieur Étienne Gerard, Monsieur de Talleyrand," said Lasalle.

I saluted, and the statesman took me in from the top of my panache to the rowel of my spur, with a glance that played over me like a rapier point.

"Have you explained to the lieutenant the circumstances under which he is summoned to the Emperor's presence?" he asked, in his dry, creaking voice.

They were such a contrast, these two men, that I could not help glancing from one to the other of them: the black, sly politician, and the big, sky-blue hussar with

one fist on his hip and the other on the hilt of his sabre. They both took their seats as I looked, Talleyrand without a sound, and Lasalle with a clash and a jingle like a prancing charger.

"It's this way, youngster," said he, in his brusque fashion; "I was with the Emperor in his private cabinet this morning when a note was brought in to him. He opened it, and as he did so he gave such a start that it fluttered down on to the floor. I handed it up to him again, but he was staring at the wall in front of him as if he had seen a ghost. 'Fratelli dell' Ajaccio,' he muttered; and then again, 'Fratelli dell' Ajaccio.' I don't prctend to know more Italian than a man can pick up in two campaigns, and I could make nothing of this. It seemed to me that he had gone out of his mind; and you would have said so also, Monsieur de Talleyrand, if you had seen the look in his eyes. He read the note, and then he sat for half an hour or more without moving."

"And you?" asked Talleyrand.

"Why, I stood there not knowing what I ought to do. Presently he seemed to come back to his senses.

"'I suppose, Lasalle,' said he, 'that you have some gallant young officers in the Tenth?'

"'They are all that, sire,' I answered.

"'If you had to pick one who was to be depended upon for action, but who would not think too much—you understand me, Lasalle—which would you select?' he asked.

"I saw that he needed an agent who would not penetrate too deeply into his plans.

"'I have one,' said I, 'who is all spurs and moustaches, with never a thought beyond women and horses.'

"'That is the man I want,' said Napoleon. 'Bring him to my private cabinet at four o'clock.'

"So, youngster, I came straight away to you at once, and mind that you do credit to the 10th Hussars."

I was by no means flattered by the reasons which had led to my Colonel's choice, and I must have shown as

much in my face, for he roared with laughter and Talleyrand gave a dry chuckle also.

"Just one word of advice before you go, Monsieur Gerard," said he: "you are now coming into troubled waters, and you might find a worse pilot than myself. We have none of us any idea as to what this little affair means, and, between ourselves, it is very important for us, who have the destinies of France upon our shoulders, to keep ourselves in touch with all that goes on. You understand me, Monsieur Gerard?"

I had not the least idea what he was driving at, but I bowed and tried to look as if it was clear to me.

"Act very guardedly, then, and say nothing to anybody," said Talleyrand. "Colonel de Lasalle and I will not show ourselves in public with you, but we will await you here, and we will give you our advice when you have told us what has passed between the Emperor and yourself. It is time that you started now, for the Emperor never forgives unpunctuality."

Off I went on foot to the palace, which was only a hundred paces off. I made my way to the ante-chamber, where Duroc, with his grand new scarlet and gold coat, was fussing about among the crowd of people who were waiting. I heard him whisper to Monsieur de Caulaincourt that half of them were German Dukes who expected to be made Kings, and the other half German Dukes who expected to be made paupers. Duroc, when he heard my name, showed me straight in, and I found myself in the Emperor's presence.

I had, of course, seen him in camp a hundred times, but I had never been face to face with him before. I have no doubt that if you had met him without knowing in the least who he was, you would simply have said that he was a sallow little fellow with a good forehead and fairly well-turned calves. His tight white cashmere breeches and white stockings showed off his legs to advantage. But even a stranger must have been struck by the singular look of his eyes, which could harden into

an expression which would frighten a grenadier. It is said that even Auguereau, who was a man who had never known what fear was, quailed before Napoleon's gaze, at a time, too, when the Emperor was but an unknown soldier. He looked mildly enough at me, however, and motioned me to remain by the door. De Meneval was writing to his dictation, looking up at him between each sentence with his spaniel eyes.

"That will do. You can go," said the Emperor, abruptly. Then, when the secretary had left the room, he strode across with his hands behind his back, and he looked me up and down without a word. Though he was a small man himself, he was very fond of having fine-looking fellows about him, and so I think that my appearance gave him pleasure. For my own part, I raised one hand to the salute and held the other upon the hilt of my sabre, looking straight ahead of me, as a soldier should.

"Well, Monsieur Gerard," said he, at last, tapping his forefinger upon one of the brandebourgs of gold braid upon the front of my pelisse, "I am informed that you are a very deserving young officer. Your Colonel gives me an excellent account of you."

I wished to make a brilliant reply, but I could think of nothing save Lasalle's phrase that I was all spurs and moustaches, so it ended in my saying nothing at all. The Emperor watched the struggle which must have shown itself upon my features, and when, finally, no answer came he did not appear to be displeased.

"I believe that you are the very man that I want," said he. "Brave and clever men surround me upon every side. But a brave man who——" He did not finish his sentence, and for my own part I could not understand what he was driving at. I contented myself with assuring him that he could count upon me to the death.

"You are, as I understand, a good swordsman?" said he.

"Tolerable, sire," I answered.

"You were chosen by your regiment to fight the champion of the Hussars of Chambarant?" said he.

I was not sorry to find that he knew so much of my exploits.

"My comrades, sire, did me that honour," said I.

"And for the sake of practice you insulted six fencing masters in the week before your duel?"

"I had the privilege of being out seven times in as many days, sire," said I.

"And escaped without a scratch?"

"The fencing master of the 23rd Light Infantry touched me on the left elbow, sire."

"Let us have no more child's play of the sort, monsieur," he cried, turning suddenly to that cold rage of his which was so appalling. "Do you imagine that I place veteran soldiers in these positions that you may practise quarte and tierce upon them? How am I to face Europe if my soldiers turn their points upon each other? Another word of your duelling, and I break you between these fingers."

I saw his plump white hands flash before my eyes as he spoke, and his voice had turned to the most discordant hissing and growling. My word, my skin pringled all over as I listened to him, and I would gladly have changed my position for that of the first man in the steepest and narrowest breach that ever swallowed up a storming party. He turned to the table, drank off a cup of coffee, and then when he faced me again every trace of this storm had vanished, and he wore that singular smile which came from his lips but never from his eyes.

"I have need of your services, Monsieur Gerard," said he. "I may be safer with a good sword at my side, and there are reasons why yours should be the one which I select. But first of all I must bind you to secrecy. Whilst I live what passes between us to-day must be known to none but ourselves."

I thought of Talleyrand and of Lasalle, but I promised.

"In the next place, I do not want your opinions or

conjectures, and I wish you to do exactly what you are told."

I bowed.

"It is your sword that I need, and not your brains. I will do the thinking. Is that clear to you?"

"Yes, sire."

"You know the Chancellor's Grove, in the forest?"

I bowed.

"You know also the large double fir-tree where the hounds assembled on Tuesday?"

Had he known that I met a girl under it three times a week, he would not have asked me. I bowed once more without remark.

"Very good. You will meet me there at ten o'clock to-night."

I had got past being surprised at anything which might happen. If he had asked me to take his place upon the Imperial throne I could only have nodded my busby.

"We shall then proceed into the wood together," said the Emperor. "You will be armed with a sword, but not with pistols. You must address no remark to me, and I shall say nothing to you. We will advance in silence. You understand?"

"I understand, sire."

"After a time we shall see a man, or more probably two men, under a certain tree. We shall approach them together. If I signal to you to defend me, you will have your sword ready. If, on the other hand, I speak to these men, you will wait and see what happens. If you are called upon to draw, you must see that neither of them, in the event of there being two, escapes from us. I shall myself assist you."

"Sire," I cried, "I have no doubt that two would not be too many for my sword; but would it not be better that I should bring a comrade than that you should be forced to join in such a struggle?"

"Ta, ta, ta," said he. "I was a soldier before I

was an Emperor. Do you think, then, that artillerymen have not swords as well as the hussars? But I ordered you not to argue with me. You will do exactly what I tell you. If swords are once out, neither of these men is to get away alive."

"They shall not, sire," said I.

"Very good. I have no more instructions for you. You can go."

I turned to the door, and then an idea occurring to me I turned.

"I have been thinking, sire——" said I.

He sprang at me with the ferocity of a wild beast. I really thought he would have struck me.

"Thinking!" he cried. "You, *you!* Do you imagine I chose you out because you could think? Let me hear of your doing such a thing again! You, the one man—but, there! You meet me at the fir-tree at ten o'clock."

My faith, I was right glad to get out of the room. If I have a good horse under me, and a sword clanking against my stirrup-iron, I know where I am. And in all that relates to green fodder or dry, barley and oats and rye, and the handling of squadrons upon the march, there is no one who can teach me very much. But when I meet a Chamberlain and a Marshal of the Palace, and have to pick my words with an Emperor, and find that everybody hints instead of talking straight out, I feel like a troop-horse who has been put in a lady's calèche. It is not my trade, all this mincing and pretending. I have learned the manners of a gentleman, but never those of a courtier. I was right glad then to get into the fresh air again, and I ran away up to my quarters like a schoolboy who has just escaped from the seminary master.

But as I opened the door, the very first thing that my eye rested upon was a long pair of sky-blue legs with hussar boots, and a short pair of black ones with knee-breeches and buckles. They both sprang up together to greet me.

"Well, what news?" they cried, the two of them.

"None," I answered.

"The Emperor refused to see you?"

"No, I have seen him."

"And what did he say?"

"Monsieur de Talleyrand," I answered, "I regret to say that it is quite impossible for me to tell you anything about it. I have promised the Emperor."

"Pooh, pooh, my dear young man," said he, sidling up to me, as a cat does when it is about to rub itself against you. "This is all among friends, you understand, and goes no farther than these four walls. Besides, the Emperor never meant to include me in this promise."

"It is but a minute's walk to the palace, Monsieur de Talleyrand," I answered; "if it would not be troubling you too much to ask you to step up to it and bring back the Emperor's written statement that he did not mean to include you in this promise, I shall be happy to tell you every word that passed."

He showed his teeth at me then like the old fox that he was.

"Monsieur Gerard appears to be a little puffed up," said he. "He is too young to see things in their just proportion. As he grows older he may understand that it is not always very discreet for a subaltern of cavalry to give such very abrupt refusals."

I did not know what to say to this, but Lasalle came to my aid in his downright fashion.

"The lad is quite right," said he. "If I had known that there was a promise I should not have questioned him. You know very well, Monsieur de Talleyrand, that if he had answered you, you would have laughed in your sleeve and thought as much about him as I think of the bottle when the burgundy is gone. As for me, I promise you that the Tenth would have had no room for him, and that we should have lost our best swordsman if I had heard him give up the Emperor's secret."

But the statesman became only the more bitter when he saw that I had the support of my Colonel.

"I have heard, Colonel de Lasalle," said he, with an icy dignity, "that your opinion is of great weight upon the subject of light cavalry. Should I have occasion to seek information about that branch of the army, I shall be very happy to apply to you. At present, however, the matter concerns diplomacy, and you will permit me to form my own views upon that question. As long as the welfare of France and the safety of the Emperor's person are largely committed to my care, I will use every means in my power to secure them, even if it should be against the Emperor's own temporary wishes. I have the honour, Colonel de Lasalle, to wish you a very good day!"

He shot a most unamiable glance in my direction, and, turning upon his heel, he walked with little, quick, noiseless steps out of the room.

I could see from Lasalle's face that he did not at all relish finding himself at enmity with the powerful Minister. He rapped out an oath or two, and then, catching up his sabre and his cap, he clattered away down the stairs. As I looked out of the window I saw the two of them, the big blue man and the limping black one, going up the street together. Talleyrand was walking very rigidly, and Lasalle was waving his hands and talking, so I suppose he was trying to make his peace.

The Emperor had told me not to think, and I endeavoured to obey him. I took up the cards from the table where Morat had left them, and I tried to work out a few combinations at écarté. But I could not remember which were trumps, and I threw them under the table in despair. Then I drew my sabre and practised giving point until I was weary, but it was all of no use at all. My mind *would* work, in spite of myself. At ten o'clock I was to meet the Emperor in the forest. Of all extraordinary combinations of events in the whole world, surely this was the last which would have occurred to me

when I rose from my couch that morning. But the responsibility—the dreadful responsibility! It was all upon my shoulders. There was no one to halve it with me. It made me cold all over. Often as I have faced death upon the battle-field, I have never known what real fear was until that moment. But then I considered that after all I could but do my best like a brave and honourable gentleman, and above all obey the orders which I had received, to the very letter. And, if all went well, this would surely be the foundation of my fortunes. Thus, swaying between my fears and my hopes, I spent the long, long evening until it was time to keep my appointment.

I put on my military overcoat, as I did not know how much of the night I might have to spend in the woods, and I fastened my sword outside it. I pulled off my hussar boots also, and wore a pair of shoes and gaiters, that I might be lighter upon my feet. Then I stole out of my quarters and made for the forest, feeling very much easier in my mind, for I am always at my best when the time of thought has passed and the moment for action arrived.

I passed the barracks of the Chasseurs of the Guards, and the line of cafés all filled with uniforms. I caught a glimpse as I went by of the blue and gold of some of my comrades, amid the swarm of dark infantry coats and the light green of the Guides. There they sat, sipping their wine and smoking their cigars, little dreaming what their comrade had on hand. One of them, the chief of my squadron, caught sight of me in the lamplight, and came shouting after me into the street. I hurried on, however, pretending not to hear him, so he, with a curse at my deafness, went back at last to his wine bottle.

It is not very hard to get into the forest at Fontainebleau. The scattered trees steal their way into the very streets, like the tirailleurs in front of a column. I turned into a path, which led to the edge of the woods, and then I pushed rapidly forward towards the old fir-tree. It was a place which, as I have hinted, I had my own reasons

for knowing well, and I could only thank the Fates that it was not one of the nights upon which Léonie would be waiting for me. The poor child would have died of terror at sight of the Emperor. He might have been too harsh with her—and worse still, he might have been too kind.

There was a half moon shining, and, as I came up to our trysting-place, I saw that I was not the first to arrive. The Emperor was pacing up and down, his hands behind him and his face sunk somewhat forward upon his breast. He wore a grey great-coat with a capote over his head. I had seen him in such a dress in our winter campaign in Poland, and it was said that he used it because the hood was such an excellent disguise. He was always fond, whether in the camp or in Paris, of walking round at night, and overhearing the talk in the cabarets or round the fires. His figure, however, and his way of carrying his head and his hands were so well known that he was always recognised, and then the talkers would say whatever they thought would please him best .

My first thought was that he would be angry with me for having kept him waiting, but as I approached him, we heard the big church clock of Fontainebleau clang out the hour of ten. It was evident, therefore, that it was he who was too soon, and not I too late. I remembered his order that I should make no remark, so contented myself with halting within four paces of him, clicking my spurs together, grounding my sabre and saluting. He glanced at me, and then without a word he turned and walked slowly through the forest, I keeping always about the same distance behind him. Once or twice he seemed to me to look apprehensively to right and to left, as if he feared that someone was observing us. I looked also, but although I have the keenest sight, it was quite impossible to see anything except the ragged patches of moonshine between the great black shadows of the trees. My ears are as quick as my eyes, and once or twice I thought that I heard a twig crack ; but you know how many sounds there are

in a forest at night, and how difficult it is even to say what direction they come from.

We walked for rather more than a mile, and I knew exactly what our destination was, long before we got there. In the centre of one of the glades, there is the shattered stump of what must at some time have been a most gigantic tree. It is called the Abbot's Beech, and there are so many ghostly stories about it, that I know many a brave soldier who would not care about mounting sentinel over it. However, I cared as little for such folly as the Emperor did, so we crossed the glade and made straight for the old broken trunk. As we approached, I saw that two men were waiting for us beneath it.

When I first caught sight of them they were standing rather behind it, as if they were not anxious to be seen, but as we came nearer they emerged from its shadow and walked forward to meet us. The Emperor glanced back at me, and slackened his pace a little so that I came within arm's length of him. You may think that I had my hilt well to the front, and that I had a very good look at these two people who were approaching us.

The one was tall, remarkably so, and of very spare frame, while the other was rather below the usual height, and had a brisk, determined way of walking. They each wore black cloaks, which were slung right across their figures, and hung down upon one side, like the mantles of Murat's dragoons. They had flat black caps, like those I have since seen in Spain, which threw their faces into darkness, though I could see the gleam of their eyes from beneath them. With the moon behind them and their long black shadows walking in front, they were such figures as one might expect to meet at night near the Abbot's Beech. I can remember that they had a stealthy way of moving, and that as they approached, the moonshine formed two white diamonds between their legs and the legs of their shadows.

The Emperor had paused, and these two strangers came to a stand also within a few paces of us. I had

drawn up close to my compani[redacted]he four of us were facing each other wi[redacted]. My eyes were particularly fixed upon the taller one, because he was slightly the nearer to me, and I became certain as I watched him that he was in the last state of nervousness. His lean figure was quivering all over, and I heard a quick, thin panting like that of a tired dog. Suddenly one of them gave a short, hissing signal. The tall man bent his back and his knees like a diver about to spring, but before he could move, I had jumped with drawn sabre in front of him. At the same instant the smaller man bounded past me, and buried a long poniard in the Emperor's heart.

My God! the horror of that moment! It is a marvel that I did not drop dead myself. As in a dream, I saw the grey coat whirl convulsively round, and caught a glimpse in the moonlight of three inches of red point which jutted out from between the shoulders. Then down he fell with a dead man's gasp upon the grass, and the assassin, leaving his weapon buried in his victim, threw up both his hands and shrieked with joy. But I—I drove my sword through his midriff with such frantic force, that the mere blow of the hilt against the end of his breast-bone sent him six paces before he fell, and left my reeking blade ready for the other. I sprang round upon him with such a lust for blood upon me as I had never felt, and never have felt, in all my days. As I turned, a dagger flashed before my eyes, and I felt the cold wind of it pass my neck and the villain's wrist jar upon my shoulder. I shortened my sword, but he winced away from me, and an instant afterwards was in full flight, bounding like a deer across the glade in the moonlight.

But he was not to escape me thus. I knew that the murderer's poniard had done its work. Young as I was, I had seen enough of war to know a mortal blow. I paused but for an instant to touch the cold hand.

"Sire! Sire!" I cried, in an agony; and then as

lothing moved, save an ever-
e moonlight, I knew that all
madly to my feet, threw off
he top of my speed after the

the wisdom which had caused me
es and gaiters! And the happy thought
thrown off my coat. He could not get rid
mantle, this wretch, or else he was too frightened
to think of it. So it was that I gained upon him from the beginning. He must have been out of his wits, for he never tried to bury himself in the darker parts of the woods, but he flew on from glade to glade, until he came to the heath-land which leads up to the great Fontainebleau quarry. There I had him in full sight, and knew that he could not escape me. He ran well, it is true—ran as a coward runs when his life is the stake. But I ran as Destiny runs when it gets behind a man's heels. Yard by yard I drew in upon him. He was rolling and staggering. I could hear the rasping and crackling of his breath. The great gulf of the quarry suddenly yawned in front of his path, and glancing at me over his shoulder, he gave a shriek of despair. The next instant he had vanished from my sight.

Vanished utterly, you understand. I rushed to the spot, and gazed down into the black abyss. Had he hurled himself over? I had almost made up my mind that he had done so, when a gentle sound rising and falling came out of the darkness beneath me. It was his breathing once more, and it showed me where he must be. He was hiding in the tool-house.

At the edge of the quarry and beneath the summit there is a small platform upon which stands a wooden hut for the use of the labourers. It was into this, then, that he had darted. Perhaps he had thought, the fool, that, in the darkness, I would not venture to follow him. He little knew Étienne Gerard. With a spring I was on the platform, with another I was through the doorway, and

then, hearing him in the corner, I hurled myself down upon the top of him.

He fought like a wild cat, but he never had a chance with his shorter weapon. I think that I must have transfixed him with that first mad lunge, for, though he struck and struck, his blows had no power in them, and presently his dagger tinkled down upon the floor. When I was sure that he was dead, I rose up and passed out into the moonlight. I climbed on to the heath again, and wandered across it as nearly out of my mind as a man could be.

With the blood singing in my ears, and my naked sword still clutched in my hand, I walked aimlessly on until, looking round me, I found that I had come as far as the glade of the Abbot's Beech and saw in the distance that gnarled stump which must ever be associated with the most terrible moment of my life. I sat down upon a fallen trunk with my sword across my knees and my head between my hands, and I tried to think about what had happened and what would happen in the future.

The Emperor had committed himself to my care. The Emperor was dead. Those were the two thoughts which clanged in my head, until I had no room for any other ones. He had come with me and he was dead. I had done what he had ordered when living. I had revenged him when dead. But what of all that? The world would look upon me as responsible. They might even look upon me as the assassin. What could I prove? What witnesses had I? Might I not have been the accomplice of these wretches? Yes, yes, I was eternally dishonoured—the lowest, most despicable creature in all France. This, then, was the end of my fine military ambitions—of the hopes of my mother. I laughed bitterly at the thought. And what was I to do now? Was I to go into Fontainebleau, to wake up the palace, and to inform them that the great Emperor had been murdered within a pace of me? I could not do it—no, I could not do it! There was but one course for an

honourable gentleman whom Fate had placed in so cruel a position. I would fall upon my dishonoured sword, and so share, since I could not avert, the Emperor's fate. I rose with my nerves strung to this last piteous deed, and as I did so, my eyes fell upon something which struck the breath from my lips. The Emperor was standing before me!

He was not more than ten yards off, with the moon shining straight upon his cold, pale face. He wore his grey overcoat, but the hood was turned back, and the front open, so that I could see the green coat of the Guides, and the white breeches. His hands were clasped behind his back, and his chin sunk forward upon his breast, in the way that was usual with him.

"Well," said he, in his hardest and most abrupt voice, "what account do you give of yourself?"

I believe that, if he had stood in silence for another minute, my brain would have given way. But those sharp military accents were exactly what I needed to bring me to myself. Living or dead, here was the Emperor standing before me and asking me questions. I sprang to the salute.

"You have killed one, I see," said he, jerking his head towards the beech.

"Yes, sire."

"And the other escaped?"

"No, sire, I killed him also."

"What!" he cried. "Do I understand that you have killed them both?" He approached me as he spoke with a smile which set his teeth gleaming in the moonlight.

"One body lies there, sire," I answered. "The other is in the tool-house at the quarry."

"Then the Brothers of Ajaccio are no more," he cried, and after a pause, as if speaking to himself: "The shadow has passed me for ever." Then he bent forward and laid his hand upon my shoulder.

"You have done very well, my young friend," said he. "You have lived up to your reputation."

He was flesh and blood, then, this Emperor. I could feel the little, plump palm that rested upon me. And yet I could not get over what I had seen with my own eyes, and so I stared at him in such bewilderment that he broke once more into one of his smiles.

"No, no, Monsieur Gerard," said he, "I am not a ghost, and you have not seen me killed. You will come here, and all will be clear to you."

He turned as he spoke, and led the way towards the great beech stump.

The bodies were still lying upon the ground, and two men were standing beside them. As we approached I saw from the turbans that they were Roustem and Mustafa, the two Mameluke servants. The Emperor paused when he came to the grey figure upon the ground, and turning back the hood which shrouded the features, he showed a face which was very different from his own.

"Here lies a faithful servant who has given up his life for his master," said he. "Monsieur de Goudin resembles me in figure and in manner, as you must admit."

What a delirium of joy came upon me when these few words made everything clear to me. He smiled again as he saw the delight which urged me to throw my arms round him and to embrace him, but he moved a step away, as if he had divined my impulse.

"You are unhurt?" he asked.

"I am unhurt, sire. But in another minute I should in my despair——"

"Tut, tut!" he interrupted. "You did very well. He should himself have been more on his guard. I saw everything which passed."

"You saw it, sire!"

"You did not hear me follow you through the wood, then? I hardly lost sight of you from the moment that you left your quarters until poor De Goudin fell. The counterfeit Emperor was in front of you and the real one behind. You will now escort me back to the palace."

He whispered an order to his Mamelukes, who saluted

in silence and remained where they were standing. For my part, I followed the Emperor with my pelisse bursting with pride. My word, I have always carried myself as a hussar should, but Lasalle himself never strutted and swung his dolman as I did that night. Who should clink his spurs and clatter his sabre if it were not I—I, Étienne Gerard—the confidant of the Emperor, the chosen swordsman of the light cavalry, the man who slew the would-be assassins of Napoleon? But he noticed my bearing and turned upon me like a blight.

"Is that the way you carry yourself on a secret mission?" he hissed, with that cold glare in his eyes. "Is it thus that you will make your comrades believe that nothing remarkable has occurred? Have done with this nonsense, monsieur, or you will find yourself transferred to the sappers, where you would have harder work and duller plumage."

That was the way with the Emperor. If ever he thought that anyone might have a claim upon him, he took the first opportunity to show him the gulf that lay between. I saluted and was silent, but I must confess to you that it hurt me after all that had passed between us. He led on to the palace, where we passed through the side door and up into his own cabinet. There were a couple of grenadiers at the staircase, and their eyes started out from under their fur caps, I promise you, when they saw a young lieutenant of hussars going up to the Emperor's room at midnight. I stood by the door, as I had done in the afternoon, while he flung himself down in an arm-chair, and remained silent so long that it seemed to me that he had forgotten all about me. I ventured at last upon a slight cough to remind him.

"Ah, Monsieur Gerard," said he, "you are very curious, no doubt, as to the meaning of all this?"

"I am quite content, sire, if it is your pleasure not to tell me," I answered.

"Ta, ta, ta," said he, impatiently. "These are only words. The moment that you were outside that door

you would begin making inquiries about what it means. In two days your brother officers would know about it, in three days it would be all over Fontainebleau, and it would be in Paris on the fourth. Now, if I tell you enough to appease your curiosity, there is some reasonable hope that you may be able to keep the matter to yourself."

He did not understand me, this Emperor, and yet I could only bow and be silent.

"A few words will make it clear to you," said he, speaking very swiftly and pacing up and down the room. "They were Corsicans, these two men. I had known them in my youth. We had belonged to the same society —Brothers of Ajaccio, as we called ourselves. It was founded in the old Paoli days, you understand, and we had some strict rules of our own which were not infringed with impunity."

A very grim look came over his face as he spoke, and it seemed to me that all that was French had gone out of him, and that it was the pure Corsican, the man of strong passions and of strange revenges, who stood before me. His memory had gone back to those early days of his, and for five minutes, wrapped in thought, he paced up and down the room with his quick little tiger steps. Then with an impatient wave of his hands he came back to his palace and to me.

"The rules of such a society," he continued, "are all very well for a private citizen. In the old days there was no more loyal brother than I. But circumstances change, and it would be neither for my welfare nor for that of France that I should now submit myself to them. They wanted to hold me to it, and so brought their fate upon their own heads. These were the two chiefs of the order, and they had come from Corsica to summon me to meet them at the spot which they named. I knew what such a summons meant. No man had ever returned from obeying one. On the other hand, if I did not go, I was sure that disaster would follow. I am a brother myself, you remember, and I know their ways."

Again there came that hardening of his mouth and cold glitter of his eyes.

"You perceive my dilemma, Monsieur Gerard," said he. "How would you have acted yourself, under such circumstances?"

"Given the word to the 10th Hussars, sire," I cried. "Patrols could have swept the woods from end to end, and brought these two rascals to your feet."

He smiled, but he shook his head.

"I had very excellent reasons why I did not wish them taken alive," said he. "You can understand that an assassin's tongue might be as dangerous a weapon as an assassin's dagger. I will not disguise from you that I wished to avoid scandal at all cost. That was why I ordered you to take no pistols with you. That also is why my Mamelukes will remove all traces of the affair, and nothing more will be heard about it. I thought of all possible plans, and I am convinced that I selected the best one. Had I sent more than one guard with De Goudin into the woods, then the brothers would not have appeared. They would not change their plans nor miss their chance for the sake of a single man. It was Colonel Lasalle's accidental presence at the moment when I received the summons which led to my choosing one of his hussars for the mission. I selected you, Monsieur Gerard, because I wanted a man who could handle a sword, and who would not pry more deeply into the affair than I desired. I trust that, in this respect, you will justify my choice as well as you have done in your bravery and skill."

"Sire," I answered, "you may rely upon it."

"As long as I live," said he, "you never open your lips upon this subject."

"I dismiss it entirely from my mind, sire. I will efface it from my recollections as if it had never been. I will promise you to go out of your cabinet at this moment exactly as I was when I entered it at four o'clock."

"You cannot do that," said the Emperor, smiling.

"You were a lieutenant at that time. You will permit me, Captain, to wish you a very good-night."

3. *How the Brigadier held the King*

HERE, upon the lapel of my coat, you may see the ribbon of my decoration, but the medal itself I keep in a leathern pouch at home, and I never venture to take it out unless one of the modern peace generals, or some foreigner of distinction who finds himself in our little town, takes advantage of the opportunity to pay his respects to the well-known Brigadier Gerard. Then I place it upon my breast, and I give my moustache the old Marengo twist which brings a grey point into either eye. Yet with it all I fear that neither they, nor you either, my friends, will ever realise the man that I was. You know me only as a civilian—with an air and a manner, it is true—but still merely as a civilian. Had you seen me as I stood in the doorway of the inn at Alamo, on the 1st of July, in the year 1810, you would then have known what the hussar may attain to.

For a month I had lingered in that accursed village, and all on account of a lance-thrust in my ankle, which made it impossible for me to put my foot to the ground. There were three besides myself at first: old Bouvet, of the Hussars of Berchény, Jacques Regnier, of the Cuirassiers, and a funny little voltigeur captain whose name I forget; but they all got well and hurried on to the front, while I sat gnawing my fingers and tearing my hair, and even, I must confess, weeping from time to time as I thought of my Hussars of Conflans, and the deplorable condition in which they must find themselves when deprived of their colonel. I was not a chief of brigade yet, you understand, although I already carried myself like one, but I was the youngest colonel in the whole service, and my regiment was wife and children to me. It went to my heart that they should be so bereaved. It is true

that Villaret, the senior major, was an excellent soldier; but still, even among the best there are degrees of merit.

Ah, that happy July day of which I speak, when first I limped to the door and stood in the golden Spanish sunshine! It was but the evening before that I had heard from the regiment. They were at Pastores, on the other side of the mountains, face to face with the English—not forty miles from me by road. But how was I to get to them? The same thrust which had pierced my ankle had slain my charger. I took advice both from Gomez, the landlord, and from an old priest who had slept that night in the inn, but neither of them could do more than assure me that there was not so much as a colt left upon the whole country-side.

The landlord would not hear of my crossing the mountains without an escort, for he assured me that El Cuchillo, the Spanish guerrilla chief, was out that way with his band, and that it meant a death by torture to fall into his hands. The old priest observed, however, that he did not think a French hussar would be deterred by that, and if I had had any doubts, they would of course have been decided by his remark.

But a horse! How was I to get one? I was standing in the doorway, plotting and planning, when I heard the clink of shoes, and, looking up, I saw a great bearded man, with a blue cloak frogged across in military fashion, coming towards me. He was riding a big black horse with one white stocking on his near fore-leg.

"Halloa, comrade!" said I, as he came up to me.

"Halloa!" said he.

"I am Colonel Gerard, of the Hussars," said I. "I have lain here wounded for a month, and I am now ready to rejoin my regiment at Pastores."

"I am Monsieur Vidal, of the commissariat," he answered, "and I am myself upon my way to Pastores. I should be glad to have your company, Colonel, for I hear that the mountains are far from safe."

"Alas," said I, "I have no horse. But if you will sell

me yours, I will promise that an escort of hussars shall be sent back for you."

He would not hear of it, and it was in vain that the landlord told him dreadful stories of the doings of El Cuchillo, and that I pointed out the duty which he owed to the army and to the country. He would not even argue, but called loudly for a cup of wine. I craftily asked him to dismount and to drink with me, but he must have seen something in my face, for he shook his head ; and then, as I approached him with some thought of seizing him by the leg, he jerked his heels into his horse's flanks, and was off in a cloud of dust.

My faith ! it was enough to make a man mad to see this fellow riding away so gaily to join his beef-barrels, and his brandy-casks, and then to think of my five hundred beautiful hussars without their leader. I was gazing after him with bitter thoughts in my mind, when who should touch me on the elbow but the little priest whom I have mentioned.

" It is I who can help you," he said. " I am myself travelling south."

I put my arms about him and, as my ankle gave way at the same moment, we nearly rolled upon the ground together.

" Get me to Pastores," I cried, " and you shall have a rosary of golden beads." I had taken one from the Convent of Spiritu Santo. It shows how necessary it is to take what you can when you are upon a campaign, and how the most unlikely things may become useful.

" I will take you," he said, in very excellent French, " not because I hope for any reward, but because it is my way always to do what I can do serve my fellow-man, and that is why I am so beloved wherever I go."

With that he led me down the village to an old cow-house, in which we found a tumble-down sort of diligence, such as they used to run early in this century, between some of our remote villages. There were three old mules, too, none of which were strong enough to carry

a man, but together they might draw the coach. The sight of their gaunt ribs and spavined legs gave me more delight than the whole two hundred and twenty hunters of the Emperor which I have seen in their stalls at Fontainebleau. In ten minutes the owner was harnessing them into the coach, with no very good will, however, for he was in mortal dread of this terrible Cuchillo. It was only by promising him riches in this world, while the priest threatened him with perdition in the next, that we at last got him safely upon the box with the reins between his fingers. Then he was in such a hurry to get off, out of fear lest we should find ourselves in the dark in the passes, that he hardly gave me time to renew my vows to the innkeeper's daughter. I cannot at this moment recall her name, but we wept together as we parted, and I can remember that she was a very beautiful woman. You will understand, my friends, that when a man like me, who has fought the men and kissed the women in fourteen separate kingdoms, gives a word of praise to the one or the other, it has a little meaning of its own.

The little priest had seemed a trifle grave when we kissed good-bye, but he soon proved himself the best of companions in the diligence. All the way he amused me with tales of his little parish up in the mountains, and I in my turn told him stories about the camp ; but, my faith, I had to pick my steps, for when I said a word too much he would fidget in his seat and his face would show the pain that I had given him. And of course it is not the act of a gentleman to talk in anything but a proper manner to a religious man, though, with all the care in the world, one's words may get out of hand sometimes.

He had come from the north of Spain, as he told me, and was going to see his mother in a village of Estremadura, and as he spoke about her little peasant home, and her joy in seeing him, it brought my own mother so vividly to my thoughts that the tears started to my eyes. In his simplicity he showed me the little gifts which he

was taking to her, and so kindly was his manner that I could readily believe him when he said he was loved wherever he went. He examined my own uniform with as much curiosity as a child, admiring the plume of my busby, and passing his fingers through the sable with which my dolman was trimmed. He drew my sword, too, and then when I told him how many men I had cut down with it, and set my finger on the notch made by the shoulder-bone of the Russian Emperor's aide-de-camp, he shuddered and placed the weapon under the leathern cushion, declaring that it made him sick to look at it.

Well, we had been rolling and creaking on our way whilst this talk had been going forward, and as we reached the base of the mountains we could hear the rumbling of cannon far away upon the right. This came from Massena, who was, as I knew, besieging Ciudad Rodrigo. There was nothing I should have wished better than to have gone straight to him, for if, as some said, he had Jewish blood in his veins, he was the best Jew that I have heard of since Joshua's time. If you were in sight of his beaky nose and bold, black eyes, you were not likely to miss much of what was going on. Still, a siege is always a poor sort of a pick-and-shovel business, and there were better prospects with my hussars in front of the English. Every mile that passed, my heart grew lighter and lighter, until I found myself shouting and singing like a young ensign fresh from St. Cyr, just to think of seeing all my fine horses and my gallant fellows once more.

As we penetrated the mountains the road grew rougher and the pass more savage. At first we had met a few muleteers, but now the whole country seemed deserted, which is not to be wondered at when you think that the French, the English, and the guerrillas had each in turn had command over it. So bleak and wild was it, one great brown wrinkled cliff succeeding another, and the pass growing narrower and narrower, that I ceased to

look out, but sat in silence, thinking of this and that, of women whom I had loved and of horses which I had handled. I was suddenly brought back from my dreams, however, by observing the difficulties of my companion, who was trying with a sort of brad-awl, which he had drawn out, to bore a hole through the leathern strap which held up his water-flask. As he worked with twitching fingers the strap escaped his grasp, and the wooden bottle fell at my feet. I stooped to pick it up, and I as did so the priest silently leaped upon my shoulders and drove his brad-awl into my eye!

My friends, I am, as you know, a man steeled to face every danger. When one has served from the affair of Zurich to that last fatal day of Waterloo, and has had the special medal, which I keep at home in a leathern pouch, one can afford to confess when one is frightened. It may console some of you, when your own nerves play you tricks, to remember that you have heard even me, Brigadier Gerard, say that I have been scared. And besides my terror at this horrible attack, and the maddening pain of my wound, there was a sudden feeling of loathing such as you might feel were some filthy tarantula to strike its fangs into you.

I clutched the creature in both hands, and, hurling him on to the floor of the coach, I stamped on him with my heavy boots. He had drawn a pistol from the front of his soutane, but I kicked it out of his hand, and again I fell with my knees upon his chest. Then, for the first time, he screamed horribly, while I, half blinded, felt about for the sword which he had so cunningly concealed. My hand had just lighted upon it, and I was dashing the blood from my face to see where he lay that I might transfix him, when the whole coach turned partly over upon its side, and my weapon was jerked out of my grasp by the shock.

. Before I could recover myself the door was burst open, and I was dragged by the heels on to the road. But even as I was torn out on to the flint stones, and realised that

thirty ruffians were standing around me, I was filled with joy, for my pelisse had been pulled over my head in the struggle and was covering one of my eyes, and it was with my wounded eye that I was seeing this gang of brigands. You see for yourself by this pucker and scar how the thin blade passed between socket and ball, but it was only at that moment, when I was dragged from the coach, that I understood that my sight was not gone for ever. The creature's intention, doubtless, was to drive it through into my brain, and indeed he loosened some portion of the inner bone of my head, so that I afterwards had more trouble from that wound than from any one of the seventeen which I have received.

They dragged me out, these sons of dogs, with curses and execrations, beating me with their fists and kicking me as I lay upon the ground. I had frequently observed that the mountaineers wore cloth swathed round their feet, but never did I imagine that I should have so much cause to be thankful for it. Presently, seeing the blood upon my head, and that I lay quiet, they thought that I was unconscious, whereas I was storing every ugly face among them into my memory, so that I might see them all safely hanged if ever my chance came round. Brawny rascals they were, with yellow handkerchiefs round their heads, and great red sashes stuffed with weapons. They had rolled two rocks across the path, where it took a sharp turn, and it was these which had torn off one of the wheels of the coach and upset us. As to this reptile, who had acted the priest so cleverly and had told me so much of his parish and his mother, he, of course, had known where the ambuscade was laid and had attempted to put me beyond all resistance at the moment when we reached it.

I cannot tell you how frantic their rage was when they drew him out of the coach and saw the state to which I had reduced him. If he had not got all his deserts, he had, at least, something as a souvenir of his meeting with Étienne Gerard, for his legs dangled aimlessly about, and

though the upper part of his body was convulsed with rage and pain, he sat straight down upon his feet when they tried to set him upright. But all the time his two little black eyes, which had seemed so kindly and so innocent in the coach, were glaring at me like a wounded cat, and he spat, and spat, and spat in my direction. My faith ! when the wretches jerked me on to my feet again, and when I was dragged off up one of the mountain paths, I understood that a time was coming when I was to need all my courage and resource. My enemy was carried upon the shoulders of two men behind me, and I could hear his hissing and his reviling, first in one ear and then in the other, as I was hurried up the winding track.

I suppose that it must have been for an hour that we ascended, and what with my wounded ankle and the pain from my eye, and the fear lest this wound should have spoiled my appearance, I have made no journey to which I look back with less pleasure. I have never been a good climber at any time, but it is astonishing what you can do, even with a stiff ankle, when you have a copper-coloured brigand at each elbow and a nine-inch blade within touch of your whiskers.

We came at last to a place where the path wound over a ridge, and descended upon the other side through thick pine-trees into a valley which opened to the south. In time of peace I had little doubt that the villains were all smugglers, and that these were the secret paths by which they crossed the Portuguese frontier. There were many mule-tracks, and once I was surprised to see the marks of a large horse where a stream had softened the track. These were explained when, on reaching a place where there was a clearing in the fir wood, I saw the animal itself haltered to a fallen tree. My eyes had hardly rested upon it, when I recognised the great black limbs and the white near fore-leg. It was the very horse which I had begged for in the morning.

What, then, had become of Commissariat Vidal ? Was it possible that there was another Frenchman in as

perilous a plight as myself? The thought had hardly entered my head when our party stopped and one of them uttered a peculiar cry. It was answered from among the brambles which lined the base of a cliff at one side of a clearing, and an instant later ten or a dozen more brigands came out from amongst them, and the two parties greeted each other. The new-comers surrounded my friend of the brad-awl with cries of grief and sympathy, and then, turning upon me, they brandished their knives and howled at me like the gang of assassins that they were. So frantic were their gestures that I was convinced that my end had come, and was just bracing myself to meet it in a manner which should be worthy of my past reputation, when one of them gave an order and I was dragged roughly across the little glade to the brambles from which this new band had emerged.

A narrow pathway led through them to a deep grotto in the side of the cliff. The sun was already setting outside, and in the cave itself it would have been quite dark but for a pair of torches which blazed from a socket on either side. Between them there was sitting at a rude table a very singular-looking person, whom I saw instantly, from the respect with which the others addressed him, could be none other than the brigand chief who had received, on account of his dreadful character, the sinister name of El Cuchillo.

The man whom I had injured had been carried in and placed upon the top of a barrel, his helpless legs dangling about in front of him, and his cat's eyes still darting glances of hatred at me. I understood, from the snatches of talk which I could follow between the chief and him, that he was the lieutenant of the band, and that part of his duties was to lie in wait with his smooth tongue and his peaceful garb for travellers like myself. When I thought of how many gallant officers may have been lured to their death by this monster of hypocrisy, it gave me a glow of pleasure to think that I had brought his villainies to an end—though I feared it would be at

the price of a life which neither the Emperor nor the army could well spare.

As the injured man, still supported upon the barrel by two comrades, was explaining in Spanish all that had befallen him, I was held by several of the villains in front of the table at which the chief was seated, and had an excellent opportunity of observing him. I have seldom seen any man who was less like my idea of a brigand, and especially of a brigand with such a reputation that in a land of cruelty he had earned so dark a nickname. His face was bluff and broad and bland, with ruddy cheeks and comfortable little tufts of side-whiskers, which gave him the appearance of a well-to-do grocer of the Rue St. Antoine. He had not any of those flaring sashes or gleaming weapons which distinguished his followers, but on the contrary he wore a good broadcloth coat like a respectable father of a family, and save for his brown leggings there was nothing to indicate a life among the mountains. His surroundings, too, corresponded with himself, and beside his snuff-box upon the table there stood a great brown book, which looked like a commercial ledger. Many other books were ranged along a plank between two powder-casks, and there was a great litter of papers, some of which had verses scribbled upon them. All this I took in while he, leaning indolently back in his chair, was listening to the report of his lieutenant. Having heard everything, he ordered the cripple to be carried out again, and I was left with my three guards, waiting to hear my fate. He took up his pen, and tapping his forehead with the handle of it, he pursed up his lips and looked out of the corner of his eyes at the roof of the grotto.

"I suppose," said he at last, speaking very excellent French, "that you are not able to suggest a rhyme for the word Covilha."

I answered him that my acquaintance with the Spanish language was so limited that I was unable to oblige him.

"It is a rich language," said he, "but less prolific in

rhymes than either the German or the English. That is why our best work has been done in blank verse, a form of composition which is capable of reaching great heights. But I fear that such subjects are somewhat outside the range of a hussar."

I was about to answer that if they were good enough for a guerrilla, they could not be too much for the light cavalry, but he was already stooping over his half-finished verse. Presently he threw down the pen with an exclamation of satisfaction, and declaimed a few lines which drew a cry of approval from the three ruffians who held me. His broad face blushed like a young girl who receives her first compliment.

"The critics are in my favour, it appears," said he; "we amuse ourselves in our long evenings by singing our own ballads, you understand. I have some little facility in that direction, and I do not at all despair of seeing some of my poor efforts in print before long, and with 'Madrid' upon the title-page, too. But we must get back to business. May I ask what your name is?"

"Étienne Gerard."

"Rank?"

"Colonel."

"Corps?"

"The Third Hussars of Conflans."

"You are young for a colonel."

"My career has been an eventful one."

"Tut, that makes it the sadder," said he, with his bland smile.

I made no answer to that, but I tried to show him by my bearing that I was ready for the worst which could befall me.

"By the way, I rather fancy that we have had some of your corps here," said he, turning over the pages of his big brown register. "We endeavour to keep a record of our operations. Here is a heading under June 24th. Have you not a young officer named Soubiron, a tall, slight youth with light hair?"

"Certainly."

"I see that we buried him upon that date."

"Poor lad!" I cried. "And how did he die?"

"We buried him."

"But before you buried him?"

"You misunderstand me, Colonel. He was not dead before we buried him."

"You buried him alive!"

For a moment I was too stunned to act. Then I hurled myself upon the man, as he sat with that placid smile of his upon his lips, and I would have torn his throat out had the three wretches not dragged me away from him. Again and again I made for him, panting and cursing, shaking off this man and that, straining and wrenching, but never quite free. At last, with my jacket torn nearly off my back and blood dripping from my wrists, I was hauled backwards in the bight of a rope and cords passed round my ankles and my arms.

"You sleek hound!" I cried. "If ever I have you at my sword's point, I will teach you to maltreat one of my lads. You will find, you blood-thirsty beast, that my Emperor has long arms, and though you lie here like a rat in its hole, the time will come when he will tear you out of it, and you and your vermin will perish together."

My faith, I have a rough side to my tongue, and there was not a hard word that I had learned in fourteen campaigns which I did not let fly at him; but he sat with the handle of his pen tapping against his forehead and his eyes squinting up at the roof as if he had conceived the idea of some new stanza. It was this occupation of his which showed me how I might get my point into him.

"You spawn!" said I; "you think that you are safe here, but your life may be as short as that of your absurd verses, and God knows that it could not be shorter than that."

Ah, you should have seen him bound from his chair when I said the words. This vile monster, who dispensed death and torture as a grocer serves out his figs,

had one raw nerve, then, which I could prod at pleasure. His face grew livid, and those little bourgeois side-whiskers quivered and thrilled with passion.

"Very good, Colonel. You have said enough," he cried, in a choking voice. "You say that you have had a very distinguished career. I promise you also a very distinguished ending. Colonel Étienne Gerard of the Third Hussars shall have a death of his own."

"And I only beg," said I, "that you will not commemorate it in verse." I had one or two little ironies to utter, but he cut me short by a furious gesture which caused my three guards to drag me from the cave.

Our interview, which I have told you as nearly as I can remember it, must have lasted some time, for it was quite dark when we came out, and the moon was shining very clearly in the heavens. The brigands had lighted a great fire of the dried branches of the fir-trees ; not, of course, for warmth, since the night was already very sultry, but to cook their evening meal. A huge copper pot hung over the blaze, and the rascals were lying all round in the yellow glare, so that the scene looked like one of those pictures which Junot stole out of Madrid. There are some soldiers who profess to care nothing for art and the like, but I have always been drawn towards it myself, in which respect I show my good taste and my breeding. I remember, for example, that when Lefebvre was selling the plunder after the fall of Danzig, I bought a very fine picture, called "Nymphs Surprised in a Wood," and I carried it with me through two campaigns, until my charger had the misfortune to put his hoof through it.

I only tell you this, however, to show you that I was never a mere rough soldier like Rapp or Ney. As I lay in that brigands' camp, I had little time or inclination to think about such matters. They had thrown me down under a tree, the three villains squatting round and smoking their cigarettes within hands' touch of me. What to do I could not imagine. In my whole career I do not suppose that I have ten times been in as hopeless

a situation. "But courage," thought I. "Courage, my brave boy! You were not made a Colonel of Hussars at twenty-eight because you could dance a cotillon. You are a picked man, Étienne; a man who has come through more than two hundred affairs, and this little one is surely not going to be the last." I began eagerly to glance about for some chance of escape, and as I did so I saw something which filled me with great astonishment.

I have already told you that a large fire was burning in the centre of the glade. What with its glare, and what with the moonlight, everything was as clear as possible. On the other side of the glade there was a single tall fir-tree which attracted my attention because its trunk and lower branches were discoloured, as if a large fire had recently been lit underneath it. A clump of bushes grew in front of it which concealed the base. Well, as I looked towards it, I was surprised to see projecting above the bush, and fastened apparently to the tree, a pair of fine riding boots with the toes upwards. At first I thought that they were tied there, but as I looked harder I saw that they were secured by a great nail which was hammered through the foot of each. And then, suddenly, with a thrill of horror, I understood that these were not empty boots; and moving my head a little to the right, I was able to see who it was that had been fastened there, and why a fire had been lit beneath the tree. It is not pleasant to speak or to think of horrors, my friends, and I do not wish to give any of you bad dreams to-night—but I cannot take you among the Spanish guerrillas without showing you what kind of men they were, and the sort of warfare that they waged. I will only say that I understood why Monsieur Vidal's horse was waiting masterless in the grove, and that I hoped he had met this terrible fate with sprightliness and courage, as a good Frenchman ought.

It was not a very cheering sight for me, as you can imagine. When I had been with their chief in the grotto I had been so carried away by my rage at the cruel

death of young Soubiron, who was one of the brightest lads who ever threw his thigh over a charger, that I had never given a thought to my own position. Perhaps it would have been more politic had I spoken the ruffian fair, but it was too late now. The cork was drawn and I must drain the wine. Besides, if the harmless commissariat man were put to such a death, what hope was there for me, who had snapped the spine of their lieutenant? No, I was doomed in any case, and it was as well perhaps that I should have put the best face on the matter. This beast could bear witness that Étienne Gerard had died as he had lived, and that one prisoner at least had not quailed before him. I lay there thinking of the various girls who would mourn for me, and of my dear old mother, and of the deplorable loss which I should be, both to my regiment and to the Emperor, and I am not ashamed to confess to you that I shed tears as I thought of the general consternation which my premature end would give rise to.

But all the time I was taking the very keenest notice of everything which might possibly help me. I am not a man who would lie like a sick horse waiting for the farrier sergeant and the pole-axe. First I would give a little tug at my ankle cords, and then another at those which were round my wrists, and all the time that I was trying to loosen them I was peering round to see if I could find something which was in my favour. There was one thing which was very evident. A hussar is but half formed without a horse, and there was my other half quietly grazing within thirty yards of me. Then I observed yet another thing. The path by which we had come over the mountains was so steep that a horse could only be led across it slowly and with difficulty, but in the other direction the ground appeared to be more open, and to lead straight down into a gently-sloping valley. Had I but my feet in yonder stirrups and my sabre in my hand, a single bold dash might take me out of the power of these vermin of the rocks.

I was still thinking it over and straining with my wrists and my ankles, when their chief came out from his grotto, and after some talk with his lieutenant, who lay groaning near the fire, they both nodded their heads and looked across at me. He then said some few words to the band, who clapped their hands and laughed uproariously. Things looked ominous, and I was delighted to feel that my hands were so far free that I could easily slip them through the cords if I wished. But with my ankles I feared that I could do nothing, for when I strained it brought such pain into my lance-wound that I had to gnaw my moustache to keep from crying out. I could only lie still, half-free and half-bound, and see what turn things were likely to take.

For a little I could not make out what they were after. One of the rascals climbed up a well-grown fir-tree upon one side of the glade, and tied a rope round the top of the trunk. He then fastened another rope in the same fashion to a similar tree upon the other side. The two loose ends were now dangling down, and I waited with some curiosity, and just a little trepidation also, to see what they would do next. The whole band pulled upon one of the ropes until they had bent the strong young tree down into a semicircle, and they then fastened it to a stump, so as to hold it so. When they had bent the other tree down in a similar fashion, the two summits were within a few feet of each other, though, as you understand, they would each spring back into their original position the instant that they were released. I already saw the diabolical plan which these miscreants had formed.

"I presume that you are a strong man, Colonel," said the chief, coming towards me with his hateful smile.

"If you will have the kindness to loosen these cords," I answered, "I will show you how strong I am."

"We were all interested to see whether you were as strong as these two young saplings," said he. "It is our intention, you see, to tie one end of each rope round your ankles and then let the trees go. If you are stronger

than the trees, then, of course, no harm would be done ; if, on the other hand, the trees are stronger than you, why, in that case, Colonel, we may have a souvenir of you upon each side of our little glade."

He laughed as he spoke, and at the sight of it the whole forty of them laughed also. Even now if I am in my darker humour, or if I have a touch of my old Lithuanian ague, I see in my sleep that ring of dark, savage faces, with their cruel eyes, and the firelight flashing upon their strong white teeth.

It is astonishing—and I have heard many make the same remark—how acute one's senses become at such a crisis as this. I am convinced that at no moment is one living so vividly, so acutely, as at the instant when a violent and foreseen death overtakes one. I could smell the resinous fagots, I could see every twig upon the ground, I could hear every rustle of the branches, as I have never smelled or seen or heard save at such times of danger. And so it was that long before anyone else, before even the time when the chief had addressed me, I had heard a low, monotonous sound, far away indeed, and yet coming nearer at every instant. At first it was but a murmur, a rumble, but by the time he had finished speaking, while the assassins were untying my ankles in order to lead me to the scene of my murder, I heard, as plainly as ever I heard anything in my life, the clinking of horseshoes and the jingling of bridle-chains, with the clank of sabres against stirrup-irons. Is it likely that I, who had lived with the light cavalry since the first hair shaded my lip, would mistake the sound of troopers on the march ?

" Help, comrades, help ! " I shrieked, and though they struck me across the mouth and tried to drag me up to the trees, I kept on yelling, " Help me, my brave boys ! Help me, my children ! They are murdering your colonel ! "

For the moment my wounds and my troubles had brought on a delirium, and I looked for nothing less than

my five hundred hussars, kettle-drums and all, to appear at the opening of the glade.

But that which really appeared was very different to anything which I had conceived. Into the clear space there came galloping a fine young man upon a most beautiful roan horse. He was fresh-faced and pleasant-looking ,with the most debonair bearing in the world and the most gallant way of carrying himself—a way which reminded me somewhat of my own. He wore a singular coat which had once been red all over, but which was now stained to the colour of a withered oak-leaf wherever the weather could reach it. His shoulder straps, however, were of golden lace, and he had a bright metal helmet upon his head, with a coquettish white plume upon one side of its crest. He trotted his horse up the glade, while behind him rode four cavaliers in the same dress—all clean-shaven, with round, comely faces, looking to me more like monks than dragoons. At a short, gruff order they halted with a rattle of arms, while their leader cantered forward, the fire beating upon his eager face and the beautiful head of his charger. I knew, of course, by the strange coats that they were English. It was the first sight that I had ever had of them, but from their stout bearing and their masterful way I could see at a glance that what I had always been told was true, and that they were excellent people to fight against.

"Well, well, well!" cried the young officer, in sufficiently bad French, "what game are you up to here? Who was that who was yelling for help, and what are you trying to do to him?"

It was at that moment that I learned to bless those months which Obriant, the descendant of the Irish kings, had spent in teaching me the tongue of the English. My ankles had just been freed, so that I had only to slip my hands out of the cords, and with a single rush I had flown across, picked up my sabre where it lay by the fire, and hurled myself on to the saddle of poor Vidal's horse. Yes, for all my wounded ankle, I never put foot to stirrup,

but was in the seat in a single bound. I tore the halter from the tree, and before these villains could so much as snap a pistol at me I was beside the English officer.

"I surrender to you, sir," I cried; though I daresay my English was not very much better than his French. "If you will look at that tree to the left you will see what these villains do to the honourable gentlemen who fall into their hands."

The fire had flared up at that moment, and there was poor Vidal exposed before them, as horrible an object as one could see in a nightmare. "Godam!" cried the officer, and "Godam!" cried each of the four troopers, which is the same as with us when we cry "Mon Dieu!" Out rasped the five swords, and the four men closed up. One, who wore a sergeant's chevrons, laughed and clapped me on the shoulder.

"Fight for your skin, froggy," said he.

Ah, it was so fine to have a horse between my thighs and a weapon in my grip. I waved it above my head and shouted in my exultation. The chief had come forward with that odious smiling face of his.

"Your excellency will observe that this Frenchman is our prisoner," said he.

"You are a rascally robber," said the Englishman, shaking his sword at him. "It is a disgrace to us to have such allies. By my faith, if Lord Wellington were of my mind we would swing you up on the nearest tree."

"But my prisoner?" said the brigand, in his suave voice.

"He shall come with us to the British camp."

"Just a word in your ear before you take him."

He approached the young officer, and then turning as quick as a flash, he fired his pistol in my face. The bullet scored its way through my hair and burst a hole on each side of my busby. Seeing that he had missed me, he raised the pistol and was about to hurl it at me when the English sergeant, with a single back-handed cut, nearly severed his head from his body. His blood

had not reached the ground, nor the last curse died on his lips, before the whole horde was upon us, but with a dozen bounds and as many slashes we were all safely out of the glade, and galloping down the winding track which led to the valley.

It was not until we had left the ravine far behind us and were right out in the open fields that we ventured to halt, and to see what injuries we had sustained. For me, wounded and weary as I was, my heart was beating proudly, and my chest was nearly bursting my tunic to think that I, Étienne Gerard, had left this gang of murderers so much by which to remember me. My faith, they would think twice before they ventured again to lay hands upon one of the Third Hussars. So carried away was I that I made a small oration to these brave Englishmen, and told them who it was that they had helped to rescue. I would have spoken of glory also, and of the sympathies of brave men, but the officer cut me short.

"That's all right," said he. "Any injuries, Sergeant?"

"Trooper Jones's horse hit with a pistol bullet on the fetlock."

"Trooper Jones to go with us. Sergeant Halliday, with troopers Harvey and Smith, to keep to the right until they touch the vedettes of the German Hussars."

So these three jingled away together, while the officer and I, followed at some distance by the trooper whose horse had been wounded, rode straight down in the direction of the English camp. Very soon we had opened our hearts, for we each liked the other from the beginning. He was of the nobility, this brave lad, and he had been sent out scouting by Lord Wellington to see if there were any signs of our advancing through the mountains. It is one advantage of a wandering life like mine, that you learn to pick up those bits of knowledge which distinguish the man of the world. I have, for example, hardly ever met a Frenchman who could repeat

an English title correctly. If I had not travelled I should not be able to say with confidence that this young man's real name was Milor the Hon. Sir Russell, Bart., this last being an honourable distinction, so that it was as the Bart that I usually addressed him, just as in Spanish one might say " the Don."

As we rode beneath the moonlight in the lovely Spanish night, we spoke our minds to each other, as if we were brothers. We were both of an age, you see, both of the light cavalry also (the Sixteenth Light Dragoons was his regiment), and both with the same hopes and ambitions. Never have I learned to know a man so quickly as I did the Bart. He gave me the name of a girl whom he had loved at a garden called Vauxhall, and, for my own part, I spoke to him of little Coralie, of the Opera. He took a lock of hair from his bosom, and I a garter. Then we nearly quarrelled over hussar and dragoon, for he was absurdly proud of his regiment, and you should have seen him curl his lip and clap his hand to his hilt when I said that I hoped it might never be its misfortune to come in the way of the Third. Finally, he began to speak about what the English call sport, and he told such stories of the money which he had lost over which of two cocks could kill the other, or which of two men could strike the other the most in a fight for a prize, that I was filled with astonishment. He was ready to bet upon anything in the most wonderful manner, and when I chanced to see a shooting star he was anxious to bet that he would see more than me, twenty-five francs a star, and it was only when I explained that my purse was in the hands of the brigands that he would give over the idea.

Well, we chatted away in this very amiable fashion until the day began to break, when suddenly we heard a great volley of musketry from somewhere in front of us. It was very rocky and broken ground, and I thought, although I could see nothing, that a general engagement had broken out. The Bart laughed at my idea, however, and explained that the sound came from the English

camp, where every man emptied his piece each morning so as to make sure of having a dry priming.

" In another mile we shall be up with the outposts," said he.

I glanced round at this, and I perceived that we had trotted along at so good a pace during the time that we were keeping up our pleasant chat, that the dragoon with the lame horse was altogether out of sight. I looked on every side, but in the whole of that vast rocky valley there was no one save only the Bart and I—both of us armed, you understand, and both of us well mounted. I began to ask myself whether after all it was quite necessary that I should ride that mile which would bring me to the British outposts.

Now, I wish to be very clear with you on this point, my friends, for I would not have you think that I was acting dishonourably or ungratefully to the man who had helped me away from the brigands. You must remember that of all duties the strongest is that which a commanding officer owes to his men. You must also bear in mind that war is a game which is played under fixed rules, and when these rules are broken one must at once claim the forfeit. If, for example, I had given a parole, then I should have been an infamous wretch had I dreamed of escaping. But no parole had been asked of me. Out of over-confidence, and the chance of the lame horse dropping behind, the Bart had permitted me to get upon equal terms with him. Had it been I who had taken him, I should have used him as courteously as he had me, but, at the same time, I should have respected his enterprise so far as to have deprived him of his sword, and seen that I had at least one guard beside myself. I reined up my horse and explained this to him, asking him at the same time whether he saw any breach of honour in my leaving him.

. He thought about it, and several times repeated that which the English say when they mean " Mon Dieu."

" You would give me the slip, would you ? " said he.

" If you can give no reason against it."

" The only reason that I can think of," said the Bart, " is that I should instantly cut your head off if you were to attempt it."

" Two can play at that game, my dear Bart," said I.

" Then we'll see who can play at it best," he cried, pulling out his sword.

I had drawn mine also, but I was quite determined not to hurt this admirable young man who had been my benefactor.

" Consider," said I, " you say that I am your prisoner. I might with equal reason say that you are mine. We are alone here, and though I have no doubt that you are an excellent swordsman, you can hardly hope to hold your own against the best blade in the six light cavalry brigades."

His answer was a cut at my head. I parried and shore off half of his white plume. He thrust at my breast. I turned his point and cut away the other half of his cockade.

" Curse your monkey-tricks ! " he cried, as I wheeled my horse away from him.

" Why should you strike at me ? " said I. " You see that I will not strike back."

" That's all very well," said he ; " but you've got to come along with me to the camp."

" I shall never see the camp," said I.

" I'll lay you nine to four you do," he cried, as he made at me, sword in hand.

But those words of his put something new into my head. Could we not decide the matter in some better way than fighting ? The Bart was placing me in such a position that I should have to hurt him, or he would certainly hurt me. I avoided his rush, though his sword-point was within an inch of my neck.

" I have a proposal," I cried. " We shall throw dice as to which is the prisoner of the other."

He smiled at this. It appealed to his love of sport.

" Where are your dice ? " he cried.

" I have none."
" Nor I. But I have cards."
" Cards let it be," said I.
" And the game ? "
" I leave it to you."
" Écarté, then—the best of three."
I could not help smiling as I agreed, for I do not suppose that there were three men in France who were my masters at the game. I told the Bart as much as we dismounted. He smiled also as he listened.

" I was counted the best player at Watier's," said he. " With even luck you deserve to get off if you beat me."

So we tethered our two horses and sat down one on either side of a great flat rock. The Bart took a pack of cards out of his tunic, and I had only to see him shuffle to convince me that I had no novice to deal with. We cut and the deal fell to him.

My faith, it was a stake worth playing for. He wished to add a hundred gold pieces a game, but what was money when the fate of Colonel Étienne Gerard hung upon the cards ? I felt as though all those who had reason to be interested in the game—my mother, my hussars, the Sixth Corps d'Armée, Ney, Massena, even the Emperor himself—were forming a ring round us in that desolate valley. Heavens, what a blow to one and all of them should the cards go against me ! But I was confident, for my écarté play was as famous as my swordsmanship, and save old Bouvet of the Hussars of Berchény, who won seventy-six out of one hundred and fifty games off me, I have always had the best of a series.

The first game I won right off, though I must confess that the cards were with me, and that my adversary could have done no more. In the second, I never played better and saved a trick by a finesse, but the Bart voled me once, marked the king, and ran out in the second hand. My faith, we were so excited that he laid his helmet down beside him and I my busby.

" I'll lay my roan mare against your black horse," said he.

" Done ! " said I.

" Sword against sword."

" Done ! " said I.

" Saddle, bridle and stirrups ! " he cried.

" Done ! " I shouted.

I had caught this spirit of sport from him. I would have laid my hussars against his dragoons had they been ours to pledge.

And then began the game of games. Oh, he played, this Englishman—he played in a way that was worthy of such a stake. But I, my friends, I was superb ! Of the five which I had to make to win, I gained three on the first hand. The Bart bit his moustache and drummed his hands, while I already felt myself at the head of my dear little rascals. On the second, I turned the king, but lost two tricks—and my score was four to his two. When I saw my next hand I could not but give a cry of delight. " If I cannot gain my freedom on this," thought I, " I deserve to remain for ever in chains."

Give me the cards, landlord, and I will lay them out on the table for you.

Here was my hand : knave and ace of clubs, queen and knave of diamonds, and king of hearts. Clubs were trumps, mark you, and I had but one point between me and freedom. He knew it was the crisis, and he undid his tunic. I threw my dolman on the ground. He led the ten of spades. I took it with my ace of trumps. One point in my favour. The correct play was to clear the trumps, and I led the knave. Down came the queen upon it, and the game was equal. He led the eight of spades, and I could only discard my queen of diamonds. Then came the seven of spades, and the hair stood straight up on my head. We each threw down a king at the final. He had won two points, and my beautiful hand had been mastered by his inferior one. I could have rolled on the ground as I thought of it. They used to play very good

écarté at Watier's in the year '10. I say it—I, Brigadier Gerard.

The last game was now four all. This next hand must settle it one way or the other. He undid his sash, and I put away my sword-belt. He was cool, this Englishman and I tried to be so also, but the perspiration would trickle into my eyes. The deal lay with him, and I may confess to you, my friends, that my hands shook so that I could hardly pick my cards from the rock. But when I raised them, what was the first thing that my eyes rested upon? It was the king, the king, the glorious king of trumps! My mouth was open to declare it when the words were frozen upon my lips by the appearance of my comrade.

He held his cards in his hand, but his jaw had fallen, and his eyes were staring over my shoulder with the most dreadful expression of consternation and surprise. I whisked round, and I was myself amazed at what I saw.

Three men were standing quite close to us—fifteen metres at the farthest. The middle one was of a good height, and yet not too tall—about the same height, in fact, that I am myself. He was clad in a dark uniform with a small cocked hat, and some sort of white plume upon the side. But I had little thought of his dress. It was his face, his gaunt cheeks, his beak-like nose, his masterful blue eyes, his thin, firm slit of a mouth which made one feel that this was a wonderful man, a man of a million. His brows were tied into a knot, and he cast such a glance at my poor Bart from under them that one by one the cards came fluttering down from his nerveless fingers. Of the two other men, one, who had a face as brown and hard as though it had been carved out of old oak, wore a bright red coat, while the other, a fine portly man with bushy side-whiskers, was in a blue jacket with gold facings. Some little distance behind, three orderlies were holding as many horses, and an escort of dragoons was waiting in the rear.

"Heh, Crauford, what the deuce is this?" asked the thin man.

"D'you hear, sir?" cried the man with the red coat. "Lord Wellington wants to know what this means."

My poor Bart broke into an account of all that had occurred, but that rock-face never softened for an instant.

"Pretty fine, 'pon my word, General Crauford," he broke in. "The discipline of this force must be maintained, sir. Report yourself at headquarters as a prisoner."

It was dreadful to me to see the Bart mount his horse and ride off with hanging head. I could not endure it. I threw myself before this English General. I pleaded with him for my friend, I told him how I, Colonel Gerard, would witness what a dashing young officer he was. Ah, my eloquence might have melted the hardest heart; I brought tears to my own eyes, but none to his. My voice broke, and I could say no more.

"What weight do you put on your mules, sir, in the French service?" he asked. Yes, that was all this phlegmatic Englishman had to answer to these burning words of mine. That was his reply to what would have made a Frenchman weep upon my shoulder.

"What weight on a mule?" asked the man with the red coat.

"Two hundred and ten pounds," said I.

"Then you load them deucedly badly," said Lord Wellington. "Remove the prisoner to the rear."

His dragoons closed in upon me, and I—I was driven mad, as I thought that the game had been in my hands, and that I ought at that moment to be a free man. I held the cards up in front of the General.

"See, my lord!" I cried; "I played for my freedom and I won, for, as you perceive, I hold the king."

For the first time a slight smile softened his gaunt face.

"On the contrary," said he, as he mounted his horse, "it is I who won, for, as you perceive, my King holds you."

4. *How the King held the Brigadier*

MURAT was undoubtedly an excellent cavalry officer, but he had too much swagger, which spoils many a good soldier. Lasalle, too, was a very dashing leader, but he ruined himself with wine and folly. Now I, Étienne Gerard, was always totally devoid of swagger, and at the same time I was very abstemious, except, maybe, at the end of a campaign, or when I met an old comrade-in-arms. For these reasons I might, perhaps, had it not been for a certain diffidence, have claimed to be the most valuable officer in my own branch of the Service. It is true that I never rose to be more than a chief of brigade, but then, as everyone knows, no one had a chance of rising to the top unless he had the good fortune to be with the Emperor in his early campaigns. Except Lasalle, and Labau, and Drouet, I can hardly remember any one of the generals who had not already made his name before the Egyptian business. Even I, with all my brilliant qualities, could only attain the head of my brigade, and also the special medal of honour, which I received from the Emperor himself, and which I keep at home in a leathern pouch.

But though I never rose higher than this, my qualities were very well known to those who had served with me, and also to the English. After they had captured me in the way which I described to you the other night, they kept a very good guard over me at Oporto, and I promise you that they did not give such a formidable opponent a chance of slipping through their fingers. It was on the 10th of August that I was escorted on board the transport which was to take us to England, and behold me before the end of the month in the great prison which had been built for us at Dartmoor! "L'hôtel Français, et Pension," we used to call it, for you understand that we were all brave men there, and that we did not lose our spirits because we were in adversity.

It was only those officers who refused to give their parole who were confined at Dartmoor, and most of the prisoners were seamen, or from the ranks. You ask me, perhaps, why it was that I did not give this parole, and so enjoy the same good treatment as most of my brother officers. Well, I had two reasons, and both of them were sufficiently strong.

In the first place, I had so much confidence in myself, that I was quite convinced that I could escape. In the second, my family, though of good repute, has never been wealthy, and I could not bring myself to take anything from the small income of my mother. On the other hand, it would never do for a man like me to be outshone by the bourgeois society of an English country town, or to be without the means of showing courtesies and attentions to those ladies whom I should attract. It was for these reasons that I preferred to be buried in the dreadful prison of Dartmoor. I wish now to tell you of my adventures in England, and how far Milor Wellington's words were true when he said that his King would hold me.

And first of all I may say that if it were not that I have set off to tell you about what befell myself, I could keep you here until morning with my stories about Dartmoor itself, and about the singular things which occurred there. It was one of the very strangest places in the whole world, for there, in the middle of that great desolate waste, were herded together seven or eight thousand men—warriors, you understand, men of experience and courage. Around there were a double wall and a ditch, and warders and soldiers; but, my faith! you could not coop men like that up like rabbits in a hutch! They would escape by twos and tens and twenties, and then the cannon would boom, and the search parties run, and we, who were left behind, would laugh and dance and shout "Vive l'Empereur" until the warders would turn their muskets upon us in their passion. And then we would have our little mutinies, too, and up would come the infantry and

the guns from Plymouth, and that would set us yelling "Vive l'Empereur" once more, as though we wished them to hear us in Paris. We had lively moments at Dartmoor, and we contrived that those who were about us should be lively also.

You must know that the prisoners there had their own Courts of Justice, in which they tried their own cases, and inflicted their own punishments. Stealing and quarrelling were punished—but most of all treachery. When I came there first there was a man, Meunier, from Rheims, who had given information of some plot to escape. Well, that night, owing to some form or other which had to be gone through, they did not take him out from among the other prisoners, and though he wept and screamed, and grovelled upon the ground, they left him there amongst the comrades whom he had betrayed. That night there was a trial with a whispered accusation and a whispered defence, a gagged prisoner, and a judge whom none could see. In the morning, when they came for their man with papers for his release, there was not as much of him left as you could put upon your thumb-nail. They were ingenious people, these prisoners, and they had their own way of managing.

We officers, however, lived in a separate wing, and a very singular group of people we were. They had left us our uniforms, so that there was hardly a corps which had served under Victor, or Massena, or Ney, which was not represented there, and some had been there from the time when Junot was beaten at Vimiera. We had chasseurs in their green tunics, and hussars, like myself, and blue-coated dragoons, and white-fronted lancers, and voltigeurs, and grenadiers, and men of the artillery and engineers. But the greater part were naval officers, for the English had had the better of us upon the seas. I could never understand this until I journeyed myself from Oporto to Plymouth, when I lay for seven days upon my back, and could not have stirred had I seen the eagle of the regiment carried off before my eyes. It was

in perfidious weather like this that Nelson took advantage of us.

I had no sooner got into Dartmoor than I began to plan to get out again, and you can readily believe that, with wits sharpened by twelve years of warfare, it was not very long before I saw my way.

You must know, in the first place, that I had a very great advantage in having some knowledge of the English language. I learned it during the months that I spent before Danzig, from Adjutant Obriant, of the Regiment Irlandais, who was sprung from the ancient kings of the country. I was quickly able to speak it with some facility, for I do not take long to master anything to which I set my mind. In three months I could not only express my meaning, but I could use the idioms of the people. It was Obriant who taught me to say " Be jabers," just just as we might say " Ma foi " ; and also " The curse of Crummle ! " which means " Ventre bleu ! " Many a time I have seen the English smile with pleasure when they have heard me speak so much like one of themselves.

We officers were put two in a cell, which was very little to my taste, for my room-mate was a tall, silent man named Beaumont, of the Flying Artillery, who had been taken by the English cavalry at Astorga.

It is seldom I meet a man of whom I cannot make a friend, for my disposition and manners are—as you know them. But this fellow had never a smile for my jests, nor an ear for my sorrows, but would sit looking at me with his sullen eyes, until sometimes I thought that his two years of captivity had driven him crazy. Ah, how I longed that old Bouvet, or any of my comrades of the hussars, was there, instead of this mummy of a man. But such as he was I had to make the best of him, and it was very evident that no escape could be made unless he were my partner in it, for what could I possibly do without him observing me ? I hinted at it, therefore, and then by degrees I spoke more plainly, until it seemed to me that I had prevailed upon him to share my lot.

I tried the walls, and I tried the floor, and I tried the ceiling, but though I tapped and probed, they all appeared to be very thick and solid. The door was of iron, shutting with a spring lock, and provided with a small grating, through which a warder looked twice in every night. Within there were two beds, two stools, two washstands —nothing more. It was enough for my wants, for when had I had as much during those twelve years spent in camps? But how was I to get out? Night after night I thought of my five hundred hussars, and had dreadful nightmares, in which I fancied that the whole regiment needed shoeing, or that my horses were all bloated with green fodder, or that they were foundered from bogland, or that six squadrons were clubbed in the presence of the Emperor. Then I would awake in a cold sweat, and set to work picking and tapping at the walls once more; for I knew very well that there is no difficulty which cannot be overcome by a ready brain and a pair of cunning hands.

There was a single window in our cell, which was too small to admit a child. It was further defended by a thick iron bar in the centre. It was not a very promising point of escape, as you will allow, but I became more and more convinced that our efforts must be directed towards it. To make matters worse, it only led out into the exercise yard, which was surrounded by two high walls. Still, as I said to my sullen comrade, it is time to talk of the Vistula when you are over the Rhine. I got a small piece of iron, therefore, from the fittings of my bed, and I set to work to loosen the plaster at the top and the bottom of the bar. Three hours I would work, and then leap into my bed upon the sound of the warder's step. Then another three hours, and then very often another yet, for I found that Beaumont was so slow and clumsy at it that it was on myself only that I could rely.

I pictured to myself my Third of Hussars waiting just outside that window, with kettledrums and standards and leopard-skin shabracks all complete. Then I would work like a madman, until my iron was crusted

with blood, as if with rust. And so, night by night, I loosened that stony plaster, and hid it away in the stuffing of my pillow, until the hour came when the iron shook ; and then with one good wrench it came off in my hand, and my first step had been made towards freedom.

You will ask me what better off I was, since, as I have said, a child could not have fitted through the opening. I will tell you. I had gained two things—a tool and a weapon. With the one I might loosen the stone which flanked the window. With the other I might defend myself when I had scrambled through. So now I turned my attention to that stone, and I picked and picked with the sharpened end of my bar until I had worked out the mortar all round. You understand, of course, that during the day I replaced everything in its position, and that the warder was never permitted to see a speck upon the floor. At the end of three weeks I had separated the stone, and had the rapture of drawing it through, and seeing a hole left with ten stars shining through it, where there had been but four before. All was ready for us now, and I replaced the stone, smearing the edges of it round with a little fat and soot, so as to hide the cracks where the mortar should have been. In three nights the moon would be gone, and that seemed the best time for our attempt.

I had now no doubt at all about getting into the yard, but I had very considerable misgivings as to how I was to get out again. It would be too humiliating, after trying here, and trying there, to have to go back to my hole again in despair, or to be arrested by the guards outside, and thrown into those damp underground cells which are reserved for prisoners who are caught in escaping. I set to work, therefore, to plan what I should do. I have never, as you know, had the chance of showing what I could do as a general. Sometimes, after a glass or two of wine, I have found myself capable of thinking out surprising combinations, and have felt that if Napoleon had entrusted me with an army corps, things

might have gone differently with him. But however that may be, there is no doubt that in the small stratagems of war, and in that quickness of invention which is so necessary for an officer of light cavalry, I could hold my own against anyone. It was now that I had need of it, and I felt sure that it would not fail me.

The inner wall which I had to scale was built of bricks, twelve feet high, with a row of iron spikes, three inches apart, upon the top. The outer I had only caught a glimpse of once or twice, when the gate of the exercise yard was open. It appeared to be about the same height, and was also spiked at the top. The space between the walls was over twenty feet, and I had reason to believe that there were no sentries there, except at the gates. On the other hand, I knew that there was a line of soldiers outside. Behold the little nut, my friends, which I had to open with no crackers, save these two hands.

One thing upon which I relied was the height of my comrade Beaumont. I have already said that he was a very tall man, six feet at least, and it seemed to me that if I could mount upon his shoulders, and get my hands upon the spikes, I could easily scale the wall. Could I pull my big companion up after me? That was the question, for when I set forth with a comrade, even though it be one for whom I bear no affection, nothing on earth would make me abandon him. If I climbed the wall and he could not follow me, I should be compelled to return to him. He did not seem to concern himself much about it, however, so I hoped that he had confidence in his own activity.

Then another very important matter was the choice of the sentry who should be on duty in front of my window at the time of our attempt. They were changed every two hours to ensure their vigilance, but I, who watched them closely each night out of my window, knew that there was a great difference between them. There were some who were so keen that a rat could not cross

the yard unseen, while others thought only of their own ease, and could sleep as soundly leaning upon a musket as if they were at home upon a feather bed. There was one especially, a fat, heavy man, who would retire into the shadow of the wall and doze so comfortably during his two hours, that I have dropped pieces of plaster from my window at his very feet, without his observing it. By good luck, this fellow's watch was due from twelve to two upon the night which we had fixed upon for our enterprise.

As the last day passed, I was so filled with nervous agitation that I could not control myself, but ran ceaselessly about my cell, like a mouse in a cage. Every moment I thought that the warder would detect the looseness of the bar, or that the sentry would observe the unmortared stone, which I could not conceal outside, as I did within. As for my companion, he sat brooding upon the end of his bed, looking at me in a sidelong fashion from time to time, and biting his nails like one who is deep in thought.

"Courage, my friend!" I cried, slapping him upon the shoulder. "You will see your guns before another month be past."

"That is very well," said he. "But whither will you fly when you get free?"

"To the coast," I answered. "All comes right for a brave man, and I shall make straight for my regiment."

"You are more likely to make straight for the underground cells, or for the Portsmouth hulks," said he.

"A soldier takes his chances," I remarked. "It is only the poltroon who reckons always upon the worst."

I raised a flush in each of his sallow cheeks at that, and I was glad of it, for it was the first sign of spirit which I had ever observed in him. For a moment he put his hand out towards his water-jug, as though he would have hurled it at me, but then he shrugged his shoulders and sat in silence once more, biting his nails, and scowling down at the floor. I could not but think, as I looked at

him, that perhaps I was doing the Flying Artillery a very bad service by bringing him back to them.

I never in my life have known an evening pass as slowly as that one. Towards nightfall a wind sprang up, and as the darkness deepened it blew harder and harder, until a terrible gale was whistling over the moor. As I looked out of my window I could not catch a glimpse of a star, and the black clouds were flying low across the heavens. The rain was pouring down, and what with its hissing and splashing, and the howling and screaming of the wind, it was impossible for me to hear the steps of the sentinels. "If I cannot hear them," thought I, "then it is unlikely that they can hear me"; and I waited with the utmost impatience until the time when the inspector should have come round for his nightly peep through our grating. Then, having peered through the darkness, and seen nothing of the sentry, who was doubtless crouching in some corner out of the rain, I felt that the moment was come. I removed the bar, pulled out the stone, and motioned to my companion to pass through.

"After you, Colonel," said he.

"Will you not go first?" I asked.

"I had rather you showed me the way."

"Come after me, then, but come silently, as you value your life."

In the darkness I could hear the fellow's teeth chattering, and I wondered whether a man ever had such a partner in a desperate enterprise. I seized the bar, however, and mounting upon my stool, I thrust my head and shoulders into the hole. I had wriggled through as far as my waist, when my companion seized me suddenly by the knees, and yelled at the top of his voice: "Help! Help! A prisoner is escaping!"

Ah, my friends, what did I not feel at that moment! Of course, I saw in an instant the game of this vile creature. Why should he risk his skin in climbing walls when he might be sure of a free pardon from the English

for having prevented the escape of one so much more distinguished than himself? I had recognised him as a poltroon and a sneak, but I had not understood the depth of baseness to which he could descend. One who has spent his life among gentlemen and men of honour does not think of such things until they happen.

The blockhead did not seem to understand that he was lost more certainly than I. I writhed back in the darkness, and seizing him by the throat, I struck him twice with my iron bar. At the first blow he yelped as a little cur does when you tread upon its paw. At the second, down he fell with a groan upon the floor. Then I seated myself upon my bed, and waited resignedly for whatever punishment my gaolers might inflict upon me.

But a minute passed and yet another, with no sound save the heavy, snoring breathing of the senseless wretch upon the floor. Was it possible, then, that amid the fury of the storm his warning cries had passed unheeded? At first it was but a tiny hope, another minute and it was probable, another and it was certain. There was no sound in the corridor, none in the courtyard. I wiped the cold sweat from my brow, and asked myself what I should do next.

One thing seemed certain. The man on the floor must die. If I left him I could not tell how short a time it might be before he gave the alarm. I dare not strike a light, so I felt about in the darkness until my hand came upon something wet, which I knew to be his head. I raised my iron bar, but there was something, my friends, which prevented me from bringing it down. In the heat of fight I have slain many men—men of honour, too, who had done me no injury. Yet here was this wretch, a creature too foul to live, who had tried to work me so great a mischief, and yet I could not bring myself to crush his skull in. Such deeds are very well for a Spanish partida—or for that matter a sansculotte of the Faubourg St. Antoine—but not for a soldier and a gentleman like me.

However, the heavy breathing of the fellow made me hope that it might be a very long time before he recovered his senses. I gagged him, therefore, and bound him with strips of blankets to the bed, so that in his weakened condition there was good reason to think that, in any case, he might not get free before the next visit of the warder. But now again I was faced with new difficulties, for you will remember that I had relied upon his height to help me over the walls. I could have sat down and shed tears of despair had not the thought of my mother and of the Emperor come to sustain me. "Courage!" said I. "If it were anyone but Étienne Gerard he would be in a bad fix now; that is a young man who is not so easily caught."

I set to work therefore upon Beaumont's sheet as well as my own, and by tearing them into strips and then plaiting them together, I made a very excellent rope. This I tied securely to the centre of my iron bar, which was a little over a foot in length. Then I slipped out into the yard, where the rain was pouring and the wind screaming louder than ever. I kept in the shadow of the prison wall, but it was as black as the ace of spades, and I could not see my own hand in front of me. Unless I walked into the sentinel I felt that I had nothing to fear from him. When I had come under the wall I threw up my bar, and to my joy it stuck the very first time between the spikes at the top. I climbed up my rope, pulled it after me, and dropped down on the other side. Then I scaled the second wall, and was sitting astride among the spikes upon the top, when I saw something twinkle in the darkness beneath me. It was the bayonet of the sentinel below, and so close was it (the second wall being rather lower than the first) that I could easily, by leaning over, have unscrewed it from its socket. There he was, humming a tune to himself, and cuddling up against the wall to keep himself warm, little thinking that a desperate man within a few feet of him was within an ace of stabbing him to the heart with his own weapon. I was

already bracing myself for the spring when the fellow, with an oath, shouldered his musket, and I heard his steps squelching through the mud as he resumed his beat. I slipped down my rope, and, leaving it hanging, I ran at the top of my speed across the moor.

Heavens, how I ran! The wind buffeted my face and buzzed in my nostrils. The rain pringled upon my skin and hissed past my ears. I stumbled into holes. I tripped over bushes. I fell among brambles. I was torn and breathless and bleeding. My tongue was like leather, my feet like lead, and my heart beating like a kettle-drum. Still I ran, and I ran, and I ran.

But I had not lost my head, my friends. Everything was done with a purpose. Our fugitives always made for the coast. I was determined to go inland, and the more so as I had told Beaumont the opposite. I would fly to the north, and they would seek me in the south. Perhaps you will ask me how I could tell which was which on such a night. I answer that it was by the wind. I had observed in the prison that it came from the north, and so, as long as I kept my face to it, I was going in the right direction.

Well, I was rushing along in this fashion when, suddenly, I saw two yellow lights shining out of the darkness in front of me. I paused for a moment, uncertain what I should do. I was still in my hussar uniform, you understand, and it seemed to me that the very first thing that I should aim at was to get some dress which should not betray me. If these lights came from a cottage, it was probable enough that I might find what I wanted there. I approached, therefore, feeling very sorry that I had left my iron bar behind; for I was determined to fight to the death before I should be retaken.

But very soon I found that there was no cottage there. The lights were two lamps hung upon each side of a carriage, and by their glare I saw that a broad road lay in front of me. Crouching among the bushes, I observed that there were two horses to the equipage, that a small

post-boy was standing at their heads, and that one of the wheels was lying in the road beside him. I can see them now, my friends: the steaming creatures, the stunted lad with his hands to their bits, and the big, black coach, all shining with the rain, and balanced upon its three wheels. As I looked, the window was lowered, and a pretty little face under a bonnet peeped out from it.

"What shall I do?" the lady cried to the post-boy, in a voice of despair. "Sir Charles is certainly lost, and I shall have to spend the night upon the moor."

"Perhaps I can be of some assistance to madame," said I, scrambling out from among the bushes into the glare of the lamps. A woman in distress is a sacred thing to me, and this one was beautiful. You must not forget that, although I was a colonel, I was only eight-and-twenty years of age.

My word, how she screamed, and how the post-boy stared! You will understand that after that long race in the darkness, with my shako broken in, my face smeared with dirt, and my uniform all stained and torn with brambles, I was not entirely the sort of gentleman whom one would choose to meet in the middle of a lonely moor. Still, after the first surprise, she soon understood that I was her very humble servant, and I could even read in her pretty eyes that my manner and bearing had not failed to produce an impression upon her.

"I am sorry to have startled you, madame," said I. "I chanced to overhear your remark, and I could not refrain from offering you my assistance." I bowed as I spoke. You know my bow, and can realise what its effect was upon the lady.

"I am much indebted to you, sir," said she. "We have had a terrible journey since we left Tavistock. Finally, one of our wheels came off, and here we are helpless in the middle of the moor. My husband, Sir Charles, has gone on to get help, and I much fear that he must have lost his way."

I was about to attempt some consolation, when I saw

beside the lady a black travelling coat, faced with astrakhan, which her companion must have left behind him. It was exactly what I needed to conceal my uniform. It is true that I felt very much like a highway robber, but then, what would you have ? Necessity has no law, and I was in an enemy's country.

" I presume, madame, that this is your husband's coat," I remarked. " You will, I am sure, forgive me, if I am compelled to——" I pulled it through the window as I spoke.

I could not bear to see the look of surprise and fear and disgust which came over her face.

" Oh, I have been mistaken in you ! " she cried. " You came to rob me, then, and not to help me. You have the bearing of a gentleman, and yet you steal my husband's coat."

" Madame," said I, " I beg that you will not condemn me until you know everything. It is quite necessary that I should take this coat, but if you will have the goodness to tell me who it is who is fortunate enough to be your husband, I shall see that the coat is sent back to him."

Her face softened a little, though she still tried to look severe. " My husband," she answered, " is Sir Charles Meredith, and he is travelling to Dartmoor Prison, upon important Government business. I only ask you, sir, to go upon your way, and to take nothing which belongs to him."

" There is only one thing which belongs to him that I covet," said I.

" And you have taken it from the carriage," she cried.

" No," I answered. " It still remains there."

She laughed in her frank English way.

" If, instead of paying me compliments, you were to return my husband's coat——" she began.

" Madame," I answered, " what you ask is quite impossible. If you will allow me to come into the

carriage, I will explain to you how necessary this coat is to me."

Heavens knows into what foolishness I might have plunged myself had we not, at this instant, heard a faint halloa in the distance, which was answered by a shout from the little post-boy. In the rain and the darkness, I saw a lantern some distance from us, but approaching rapidly.

"I am sorry, madame, that I am forced to leave you," said I. "You can assure your husband that I shall take every care of his coat." Hurried as I was, I ventured to pause a moment to salute the lady's hand, which she snatched through the window with an admirable pretence of being offended at my presumption. Then, as the lantern was quite close to me, and the post-boy seemed inclined to interfere with my flight, I tucked my precious overcoat under my arm, and dashed off into the darkness.

And now I set myself to the task of putting as broad a stretch of moor between the prison and myself as the remaining hours of darkness would allow. Setting my face to the wind once more, I ran until I fell from exhaustion. Then, after five minutes of panting among the heather, I made another start, until again my knees gave way beneath me. I was young and hard, with muscles of steel, and a frame which had been toughened by twelve years of camp and field. Thus I was able to keep up this wild flight for another three hours, during which I still guided myself, you understand, by keeping the wind in my face. At the end of that time I calculated that I had put nearly twenty miles between the prison and myself. Day was about to break, so I crouched down among the heather upon the top of one of those small hills which abound in that country, with the intention of hiding myself until nightfall. It was no new thing for me to sleep in the wind and the rain, so, wrapping myself up in my thick warm cloak, I soon sank into a doze.

But it was not a refreshing slumber. I tossed and

tumbled amid a series of vile dreams, in which everything seemed to go wrong with me. At last, I remember, I was charging an unshaken square of Hungarian Grenadiers, with a single squadron upon spent horses, just as I did at Elchingen. I stood in my stirrups to shout "Vive l'Empereur!" and as I did so, there came the answering roar from my hussars, "Vive l'Empereur!" I sprang from my rough bed, with the words still ringing in my ears, and then, as I rubbed my eyes, and wondered if I were mad, the same cry came again, five thousand voices in one long-drawn yell. I looked out from my screen of brambles, and saw in the clear light of morning the very last thing that I should either have expected or chosen.

It was Dartmoor Prison! There it stretched, grim and hideous, within a furlong of me. Had I run on for a few more minutes in the dark, I should have butted my shako against the wall. I was so taken aback at the sight, that I could scarcely realise what had happened. Then it all became clear to me, and I struck my head with my hands in my despair. The wind had veered from north to south during the night, and I, keeping my face always towards it, had run ten miles out and ten miles in, winding up where I had started. When I thought of my hurry, my falls, my mad rushing and jumping, all ending in this, it seemed so absurd, that my grief changed suddenly to amusement, and I fell among the brambles, and laughed, and laughed, until my sides were sore. Then I rolled myself up in my cloak and considered seriously what I should do.

One lesson which I have learned in my roaming life, my friends, is never to call anything a misfortune until you have seen the end of it. Is not every hour a fresh point of view? In this case I soon perceived that accident had done for me as much as the most profound cunning. My guards naturally commenced their search from the place where I had taken Sir Charles Meredith's coat, and from my hiding-place I could see them hurrying

along the road to that point. Not one of them ever dreamed that I could have doubled back from there, and I lay quite undisturbed in the little bush-covered cup at the summit of my knoll. The prisoners had, of course, learned of my escape, and all day exultant yells, like that which had aroused me in the morning, resounded over the moor, bearing a welcome message of sympathy and companionship to my ears. How little did they dream that on the top of that very mound, which they could see from their windows, was lying the comrade whose escape they were celebrating? As for me—I could look down upon this poor herd of idle warriors, as they paced about the great exercise yard, or gathered in little groups, gesticulating joyfully over my success. Once I heard a howl of execration, and I saw Beaumont, his head all covered with bandages, being led across the yard by two of the warders. I cannot tell you the pleasure which this sight gave me, for it proved that I had not killed him, and also that the others knew the true story of what had passed. They had all known me too well to think that I could have abandoned him.

All that long day I lay behind my screen of bushes, listening to the bells which struck the hours below.

My pockets were filled with bread which I had saved out of my allowance, and on searching my borrowed overcoat I came upon a silver flask, full of excellent brandy and water, so that I was able to get through the day without hardship. The only other things in the pockets were a red silk handkerchief, a tortoise-shell snuff-box, and a blue envelope, with a red seal, addressed to the Governor of Dartmoor Prison. As to the first two, I determined to send them back when I should return the coat itself.

The letter caused me more perplexity, for the Governor had always shown me every courtesy, and it offended my sense of honour that I should interfere with his correspondence. I had almost made up my mind to leave it under a stone upon the roadway within musket-shot of

the gate. This would guide them in their search for me, however, and so, on the whole, I saw no better way than just to carry the letter with me in the hope that I might find some means of sending it back to him. Meanwhile I packed it safely away in my innermost pocket.

There was a warm sun to dry my clothes, and when night fell I was ready for my journey. I promise you that there were no mistakes this time. I took the stars for my guides, as every hussar should be taught to do, and I put eight good leagues between myself and the prison. My plan now was to obtain a complete suit of clothes from the first person whom I could waylay, and I should then find my way to the north coast, where there were many smugglers and fishermen who would be ready to earn the reward which was paid by the Emperor to those who brought escaping prisoners across the Channel. I had taken the panache from my shako so that it might escape notice, but even with my fine overcoat I feared that sooner or later my uniform would betray me. My first care must be to provide myself with a complete disguise.

When day broke, I saw a river upon my right and a small town upon my left—the blue smoke reeking up above the moor. I should have liked well to have entered it, because it would have interested me to see something of the customs of the English, which differ very much from those of other nations. Much as I should have wished, however, to have seen them eat their raw meat and sell their wives, it would have been dangerous until I had got rid of my uniform. My cap, my moustache and my speech would all help to betray me. I continued to travel towards the north therefore, looking about me continually, but never catching a glimpse of my pursuers.

About mid-day I came to where, in a secluded valley, there stood a single small cottage without any other building in sight. It was a neat little house, with a rustic porch and a small garden in front of it, with a swarm of cocks and hens. I lay down among the ferns

and watched it, for it seemed to be exactly the kind of place where I might obtain what I wanted. My bread was finished, and I was exceedingly hungry after my long journey ; I determined, therefore, to make a short reconnaissance, and then to march up to this cottage, summon it to surrender, and help myself to all that I needed. It could at least provide me with a chicken and with an omelette. My mouth watered at the thought.

As I lay there, wondering who could live in this lonely place, a brisk little fellow came out through the porch, accompanied by another older man, who carried two large clubs in his hands. These he handed to his young companion, who swung them up and down, and round and round, with extraordinary swiftness. The other, standing beside him, appeared to watch him with great attention, and occasionally to advise him. Finally he took a rope, and began skipping like a girl, the other still gravely observing him. As you may think, I was utterly puzzled as to what these people could be, and could only surmise that the one was a doctor, and the other a patient who had submitted himself to some singular method of treatment.

Well, as I lay watching and wondering, the older man brought out a great-coat, and held it while the other put it on and buttoned it to his chin. The day was a warmish one, so that this proceeding amazed me even more than the other. " At least," thought I, " it is evident that his exercise is over " ; but, far from this being so, the man began to run, in spite of his heavy coat, and as it chanced, he came right over the moor in my direction. His companion had re-entered the house, so that this arrangement suited me admirably. I would take the small man's clothing, and hurry on to some village where I could buy provisions. The chickens were certainly tempting, but still there were at least two men in the house, so perhaps it would be wiser for me, since I had no arms, to keep away from it.

I lay quietly then among the ferns. Presently I heard

the steps of the runner, and there he was quite close to me, with his huge coat, and the perspiration running down his face. He seemed to be a very solid man—but small—so small that I feared that his clothes might be of little use to me. When I jumped out upon him he stopped running, and looked at me in the greatest astonishment."

"Blow my dickey," said he, "give it a name, guv'nor! Is it a circus, or what?"

That was how he talked, though I cannot pretend to tell you what he meant by it.

"You will excuse me, sir," said I, "but I am under the necessity of asking you to give me your clothes."

"Give you what?" he cried.

"Your clothes."

"Well, if this don't lick cock-fighting!" said he. "What am I to give you my clothes for?"

"Because I need them."

"And suppose I won't?"

"Be jabers," said I, "I shall have no choice but to take them."

He stood with his hands in the pockets of his great-coat, and a most amused smile upon his square-jawed, clean-shaven face.

"You'll take them, will you?" said he. "You're a very leery cove, by the look of you, but I can tell you that you've got the wrong sow by the ear this time. I know who you are. You're a runaway Frenchy, from the prison yonder, as anyone could tell with half an eye. But you don't know who I am, else you wouldn't try such a plant as that. Why, man, I'm the Bristol Bustler, nine stone champion, and them's my training quarters down yonder."

He stared at me as if this announcement of his would have crushed me to the earth, but I smiled at him in my turn, and looked him up and down, with a twirl of my moustache.

"You may be a very brave man, sir," said I, "but when I tell you that you are opposed to Colonel Étienne Gerard, of the Hussars of Conflans, you will see the necessity of giving up your clothes without further parley."

"Look here, mounseer, drop it!" he cried; "this'll end by your getting pepper."

"Your clothes, sir, this instant!" I shouted, advancing fiercely upon him.

For answer he threw off his heavy great-coat, and stood in a singular attitude, with one arm out, and the other across his chest, looking at me with a curious smile. For myself, I knew nothing of the methods of fighting which these people have, but on horse or on foot, with arms or without them, I am always ready to take my own part. You understand that a soldier cannot always choose his own methods, and that it is time to howl when you are living among wolves. I rushed at him, therefore, with a warlike shout, and kicked him with both my feet. At the same moment my heels flew into the air, I saw as many flashes as at Austerlitz, and the back of my head came down with a crash upon a stone. After that I can remember nothing more.

When I came to myself I was lying upon a truckle-bed, in a bare, half-furnished room. My head was ringing like a bell, and when I put up my hand, there was a lump like a walnut over one of my eyes. My nose was full of a pungent smell, and I soon found that a strip of paper soaked in vinegar was fastened across my brow. At the other end of the room this terrible little man was sitting with his knee bare, and his elderly companion was rubbing it with some liniment. The latter seemed to be in the worst of tempers, and he kept up a continual scolding, which the other listened to with a gloomy face.

"Never heard tell of such a thing in my life," he was saying. "In training for a month with all the weight of it on my shoulders, and then when I get you as fit as a trout, and within two days of fighting the likeliest

man on the list, you let yourself into a bye-battle with a foreigner."

"There, there! Stow your gab!" said the other, sulkily. "You're a very good trainer, Jim, but you'd be better with less jaw."

"I should think it was time to jaw," the elderly man answered. "If this knee don't get well before next Wednesday, they'll have it that you fought a cross, and a pretty job you'll have next time you look for a backer."

"Fought a cross!" growled the other. "I've won nineteen battles, and no man ever so much as dared to say the word 'cross' in my hearin'. How the deuce was I to get out of it when the cove wanted the very clothes off my back?"

"Tut, man; you knew that the beak and the guards were within a mile of you. You could have set them on to him as well then as now. You'd have got your clothes back again all right."

"Well, strike me!" said the Bustler. "I don't often break my trainin', but when it comes to givin' up my clothes to a Frenchy who couldn't hit a dint in a pat o' butter, why, it's more than I can swaller."

"Pooh, man, what are the clothes worth? D'you know that Lord Rufton alone has five thousand pounds on you? When you jump the ropes on Wednesday, you'll carry every penny of fifty thousand into the ring. A pretty thing to turn up with a swollen knee and a story about a Frenchman!"

"I never thought he'd ha' kicked," said the Bustler.

"I suppose you expected he'd fight Broughton's rules, and strict P.R.? Why, you silly, they don't know what fighting is in France."

"My friends," said I, sitting up on my bed, "I do not understand very much of what you say, but when you speak like that it is foolishness. We know so much about fighting in France, that we have paid our little visit to nearly every capital in Europe, and very soon we are coming to London. But we fight like soldiers, you

understand, and not like gamins in the gutter. You strike me on the head. I kick you on the knee. It is child's play. But if you will give me a sword, and take another one, I will show you how we fight over the water."

They both stared at me in their solid, English way.

"Well, I'm glad you're not dead, mounseer," said the elder one at last. "There wasn't much sign of life in you when the Bustler and me carried you down. That head of yours ain't thick enough to stop the crook of the hardest hitter in Bristol."

"He's a game cove, too, and he came for me like a bantam," said the other, still rubbing his knee. "I got my old left-right in, and he went over as if he had been pole-axed. It wasn't my fault, mounseer. I told you you'd get pepper if you went on."

"Well, it's something to say all your life, that you've been handled by the finest light-weight in England," said the older man, looking at me with an expression of congratulation upon his face. "You've had him at his best, too—in the pink of condition, and trained by Jim Hunter."

"I am used to hard knocks," said I, unbuttoning my tunic, and showing my two musket wounds. Then I bared my ankle also, and showed the place in my eye where the guerrilla had stabbed me.

"He can take his gruel," said the Bustler.

"What a glutton he'd have made for the middle-weights," remarked the trainer; "with six months' coaching he'd astonish the Fancy. It's a pity he's got to go back to prison."

I did not like that last remark at all. I buttoned up my coat and rose from the bed.

"I must ask you to let me continue my journey," said I.

"There's no help for it, mounseer," the trainer anwered. "It's a hard thing to send such a man as you back to such a place, but business is business, and there's

a twenty-pound reward. They were here this morning, looking for you, and I expect they'll be round again."

His words turned my heart to lead.

"Surely, you would not betray me!" I cried. "I will send you twice twenty pounds on the day that I set foot upon France. I swear it upon the honour of a French gentleman."

But I only got head-shakes for a reply. I pleaded, I argued, I spoke of the English hospitality and the fellowship of brave men, but I might as well have been addressing the two great wooden clubs which stood balanced upon the floor in front of me. There was no sign of sympathy upon their bull-faces.

"Business is business, mounseer," the old trainer repeated. "Besides, how am I to put the Bustler into the ring on Wednesday if he's jugged by the beak for aidin' and abettin' a prisoner of war? I've got to look after the Bustler, and I take no risks."

This, then, was the end of all my struggles and strivings. I was to be led back again like a poor silly sheep who has broken through the hurdles. They little knew me who could fancy that I should submit to such a fate. I had heard enough to tell me where the weak point of these two men was, and I showed, as I have often showed before, that Étienne Gerard is never so terrible as when all hope seems to have deserted him. With a single spring I seized one of the clubs and swung it over the head of the Bustler.

"Come what may," I cried, "*you* shall be spoiled for Wednesday."

The fellow growled out an oath, and would have sprung at me, but the other flung his arms round him and pinned him to the chair.

"Not if I know it, Bustler," he screamed. "None of your games while I am by. Get away out of this, Frenchy. We only want to see your back. Run away, run away, or he'll get loose!"

It was good advice, I thought, and I ran to the door, but

as I came out into the open air my head swam round and I had to lean against the porch to save myself from falling. Consider all that I had been through, the anxiety of my escape, the long, useless flight in the storm, the day spent amid wet ferns, with only bread for food, the second journey by night, and now the injuries which I had received in attempting to deprive the little man of his clothes. Was it wonderful that even I should reach the limits of my endurance?

I stood there in my heavy coat and my poor battered shako, my chin upon my chest, and my eyelids over my eyes. I had done my best, and I could do no more. It was the sound of horses' hoofs which made me at last raise my head, and there was the grey-moustached Governor of Dartmoor prison not ten paces in front of me, with six mounted warders behind him!

"So, Colonel," said he, with a bitter smile, "we have found you once more."

When a brave man has done his utmost, and has failed, he shows his breeding by the manner in which he accepts his defeat. For me, I took the letter which I had in my pocket, and stepping forward, I handed it, with such grace of manner as I could summon, to the Governor.

"It has been my misfortune, sir, to detain one of your letters," said I.

He looked at me in amazement, and beckoned to the warders to arrest me. Then he broke the seal of the letter. I saw a curious expression come over his face as he read it.

"This must be the letter which Sir Charles Meredith lost," said he.

"It was in the pocket of his coat."

"You have carried it for two days?"

"Since the night before last."

"And never looked at the contents?"

I showed him by my manner that he had committed an indiscretion in asking a question which one gentleman should not have put to another.

To my surprise he burst out into a roar of laughter.

"Colonel," he said, wiping the tears from his eyes, "you have really given both yourself and us a great deal of unnecessary trouble. Allow me to read the letter which you carried with you in your flight."

And this was what I heard:

"On receipt of this you are directed to release Colonel Étienne Gerard, of the 3rd Hussars, who has been exchanged against Colonel Mason, of the Horse Artillery, now in Verdun."

And as he read it, he laughed again, and the warders laughed, and the two men from the cottage laughed, and then, as I heard this universal merriment, and thought of all my hopes and fears, and my struggles and dangers, what could a debonair soldier do but lean against the porch once more, and laugh as heartily as any of them? And of them all was it not I who had the best reason to laugh, since in front of me I could see my dear France, and my mother, and the Emperor, and my horsemen; while behind lay the gloomy prison, and the heavy hand of the English King?

5. *How the Brigadier took the Field against the Marshal Millefleurs*

MASSENA was a thin, sour little fellow, and after his hunting accident he had only one eye, but when it looked out from under his cocked hat there was not much upon a field of battle which escaped it. He could stand in front of a battalion, and with a single sweep tell you if a buckle or a gaiter button were out of place. Neither the officers nor the men were very fond of him, for he was, as you know, a miser, and soldiers love that their leaders should be free-handed. At the same time, when it came to work they had a very high respect for him, and they would rather fight under him than under anyone except the Emperor himself, and

Lannes, when he was alive. After all, if he had a tight grasp upon his money-bags, there was a day also, you must remember, when that same grip was upon Zurich and Genoa. He clutched on to his positions as he did to his strong box, and it took a very clever man to loosen him from either.

When I received his summons I went gladly to his head-quarters, for I was always a great favourite of his, and there was no officer of whom he thought more highly. That was the best of serving with those good old generals, that they knew enough to be able to pick out a fine soldier when they saw one. He was seated alone in his tent, with his chin upon his hand, and his brow as wrinkled as if he had been asked for a subscription. He smiled, however, when he saw me before him.

"Good day, Colonel Gerard."

"Good day, Marshal."

"How is the Third of Hussars?"

"Seven hundred incomparable men upon seven hundred excellent horses."

"And your wounds—are they healed?"

"My wounds never heal, Marshal," I answered.

"And why?"

"Because I have always new ones."

"General Rapp must look to his laurels," said he, his face all breaking into wrinkles as he laughed. "He has had twenty-one from the enemy's bullets, and as many from Larrey's knives and probes. Knowing that you were hurt, Colonel, I have spared you of late."

"Which hurt me most of all."

"Tut, tut! Since the English got behind these accursed lines of Torres Vedras, there has been little for us to do. You did not miss much during your imprisonment at Dartmoor. But now we are on the eve of action."

"We advance?"

"No, retire."

My face must have shown my dismay. What, retire before this sacred dog of a Wellington—he who had

listened unmoved to my words, and had sent me to his land of fogs? I could have sobbed as I thought of it.

"What would you have?" cried Massena, impatiently. "When one is in check, it is necessary to move the king."

"Forwards," I suggested.

He shook his grizzled head.

"The lines are not to be forced," said he. "I have already lost General St. Croix and more men than I can replace. On the other hand, we have been here at Santarem for nearly six months. There is not a pound of flour nor a jug of wine on the country-side. We must retire."

"There are flour and wine in Lisbon," I persisted.

"Tut, you speak as if an army could charge in and charge out again like your regiment of hussars. If Soult were here with thirty thousand men—but he will not come. I sent for you, however, Colonel Gerard, to say that I have a very singular and important expedition which I intend to place under your direction."

I pricked up my ears, as you can imagine. The Marshal unrolled a great map of the country and spread it upon the table. He flattened it out with his little, hairy hands.

"This is Santarem," he said, pointing.

I nodded.

"And here, twenty-five miles to the east, is Almeixal, celebrated for its vintages and for its enormous Abbey."

Again I nodded; I could not think what was coming.

"Have you heard of the Marshal Millefleurs?" asked Massena.

"I have served with all the Marshals," said I, "but there is none of that name."

"It is but the nickname which the soldiers have given him," said Massena. "If you had not been away from us for some months, it would not be necessary for me to tell you about him. He is an Englishman, and a man of good breeding. It is on account of his manners that

they have given him his title. I wish you to go to this polite Englishman at Almeixal."

"Yes, Marshal."

"And to hang him to the nearest tree."

"Certainly, Marshal."

I turned briskly upon my heels, but Massena recalled me before I could reach the opening of his tent.

"One moment, Colonel," said he; "you had best learn how matters stand before you start. You must know, then, that this Marshal Millefleurs, whose real name is Alexis Morgan, is a man of very great ingenuity and bravery. He was an officer in the English Guards, but having been broken for cheating at cards, he left the army. In some manner he gathered a number of English deserters round him and took to the mountains. French stragglers and Portuguese brigands joined him, and he found himself at the head of five hundred men. With these he took possession of the Abbey of Almeixal, sent the monks about their business, fortified the place, and gathered in the plunder of all the country round."

"For which it is high time he was hanged," said I, making once more for the door.

"One instant!" cried the Marshal, smiling at my impatience. "The worst remains behind. Only last week the Dowager Countess of La Ronda, the richest woman in Spain, was taken by these ruffians in the passes as she was journeying from King Joseph's Court to visit her grandson. She is now a prisoner in the Abbey, and is only protected by her——"

"Grandmotherhood," I suggested.

"Her power of paying a ransom," said Massena. "You have three missions, then. To rescue this unfortunate lady; to punish this villain; and, if possible, to break up this nest of brigands. It will be a proof of the confidence which I have in you when I say that I can only spare you half a squadron with which to accomplish all this."

My word, I could hardly believe my ears! I thought that I should have had my regiment at the least.

"I would give you more," said he, "but I commence my retreat to-day, and Wellington is so strong in horse that every trooper becomes of importance. I cannot spare you another man. You will see what you can do, and you will report yourself to me at Abrantes not later than to-morrow night."

It was very complimentary that he should rate my powers so high, but it was also a little embarrassing. I was to rescue an old lady, to hang an Englishman, and to break up a band of five hundred assassins—all with fifty men. But after all, the fifty men were Hussars of Conflans, and they had an Étienne Gerard to lead them. As I came out into the warm Portuguese sunshine my confidence had returned to me, and I had already begun to wonder whether the medal which I had so often deserved might not be waiting for me at Almeixal.

You may be sure that I did not take my fifty men at haphazard. They were all old soldiers of the German wars, some of them with three stripes, and most of them with two. Oudet and Papilette, two of the best sub-officers in the regiment, were at their head. When I had them formed up in fours, all in silver grey and upon chestnut horses, with their leopard skin shabracks and their little red panaches, my heart beat high at the sight. I could not look at their weather-stained faces, with the great moustaches which bristled over their chin-straps, without feeling a glow of confidence, and, between ourselves, I have no doubt that that was exactly how they felt when they saw their young Colonel on his great black war-horse riding at their head.

Well, when we got free of the camp and over the Tagus, I threw out my advance and my flankers, keeping my own place at the head of the main body. Looking back from the hills above Santarem, we could see the dark lines of Massena's army, with the flash and twinkle of the sabres and bayonets as he moved his regiments into

position for their retreat. To the south lay the scattered red patches of the English outposts, and behind the grey smoke-cloud which rose from Wellington's camp—thick, oily smoke, which seemed to our poor starving fellows to bear with it the rich smell of seething camp-kettles. Away to the west lay a curve of blue sea flecked with the white sails of the English ships.

You will understand that as we were riding to the east, our road lay away from both armies. Our own marauders, however, and the scouting parties of the English, covered the country, and it was necessary with my small troop that I should take every precaution. During the whole day we rode over desolate hill-sides, the lower portions covered by the budding vines, but the upper turning from green to grey, and jagged along the skyline like the back of a starved horse. Mountain streams crossed our path running west to the Tagus, and once we came to a deep, strong river, which might have checked us had I not found the ford by observing where houses had been built opposite each other upon either bank. Between them, as every scout should know, you will find your ford. There was none to give us information, for neither man nor beast, nor any living thing except great clouds of crows, was to be seen during our journey.

The sun was beginning to sink when we came to a valley clear in the centre, but shrouded by huge oak trees upon either side. We could not be more than a few miles from Almeixal, so it seemed to me to be best to keep among the groves, for the spring had been an early one and the leaves were already thick enough to conceal us. We were riding then in open order among the great trunks, when one of my flankers came galloping up.

"There are English across the valley, Colonel," he cried, as he saluted.

"Cavalry or infantry?"

"Dragoons, Colonel," said he; "I saw the gleam of their helmets, and heard the neigh of a horse."

Halting my men I hastened to the edge of the wood.

There could be no doubt about it. A party of English cavalry was travelling in a line with us, and in the same direction. I caught a glimpse of their red coats and of their flashing arms glowing and twinkling among the tree-trunks. Once, as they passed through a small clearing, I could see their whole force, and I judged that they were of about the same strength as my own—a half squadron at the most.

You who have heard some of my little adventures will give me credit for being quick in my decisions, and prompt in carrying them out. But here I must confess that I was in two minds. On the one hand there was the chance of a fine cavalry skirmish with the English. On the other hand, there was my mission at the Abbey of Almeixal, which seemed already to be so much above my power. If I were to lose any of my men, it was certain that I should be unable to carry out my orders. I was sitting my horse, with my chin in my gauntlet, looking across at the rippling gleams of light from the further wood, when suddenly one of these red-coated Englishmen rode out from the cover, pointing at me and breaking into a shrill whoop and halloa as if I had been a fox. Three others joined him, and one who was a bugler sounded a call, which brought the whole of them into the open. They were, as I had thought, a half squadron, and they formed a double line with a front of twenty-five, their officer—the one who had whooped at me—at their head.

For my own part, I had instantly brought my own troopers into the same formation, so that there we were, hussars and dragoons, with only two hundred yards of grassy sward between us. They carried themselves well, those red-coated troopers, with their silver helmets, their high white plumes, and their long, gleaming swords; while, on the other hand, I am sure that they would acknowledge that they had never looked upon finer light horsemen than the fifty hussars of Conflans who were facing them. They were heavier, it is true, and they

may have seemed the smarter, for Wellington used to make them burnish their metal work, which was not usual among us. On the other hand, it is well known that the English tunics were too tight for the sword-arm, which gave our men an advantage. As to bravery, foolish, inexperienced people of every nation always think that their own soldiers are braver than any others. There is no nation in the world which does not entertain this idea. But when one has seen as much as I have done, one understands that there is no very marked difference, and that although nations differ very much in discipline, they are all equally brave—except that the French have rather more courage than the rest.

Well, the cork was drawn and the glasses ready, when suddenly the English officer raised his sword to me as if in a challenge, and cantered his horse across the grassland. My word, there is no finer sight upon earth than that of a gallant man upon a gallant steed ! I could have halted there just to watch him as he came with such careless grace, his sabre down by his horse's shoulder, his head thrown back, his white plume tossing—youth and strength and courage, with the violet evening sky above and the oak trees behind. But it was not for me to stand and stare. Étienne Gerard may have his faults, but, my faith, he was never accused of being backward in taking his own part. The old horse, Rataplan, knew me so well that he had started off before ever I gave the first shake to the bridle.

There are two things in this world that I am very slow to forget ; the face of a pretty woman, and the legs of a fine horse. Well, as we drew together, I kept on saying, " Where have I seen those great roan shoulders ? Where have I seen that dainty fetlock ? " Then suddenly I remembered, and as I looked up at the reckless eyes and the challenging smile, whom should I recognise but the man who had saved me from the brigands and played me for my freedom—he whose correct title was Milor the Hon. Sir Russell, Bart !

" Bart ! " I shouted.

He had his arm raised for a cut, and three parts of his body open to my point, for he did not know very much about the use of the sword. As I brought my hilt to the salute he dropped his hand and stared at me.

" Halloa ! " said he. " It's Gerard ! " You would have thought by his manner that I had met him by appointment. For my own part, I would have embraced him had he but come an inch of the way to meet me.

" I thought we were in for some sport," said he. " I never dreamed that it was you."

I found this tone of disappointment somewhat irritating. Instead of being glad at having met a friend, he was sorry at having missed an enemy.

" I should have been happy to join in your sport, my dear Bart," said I. " But I really cannot turn my sword upon a man who saved my life."

" Tut, never mind about that."

" No, it is impossible. I should never forgive myself."

" You make too much of a trifle."

" My mother's one desire is to embrace you. If ever you should be in Gascony——"

" Lord Wellington is coming there with 60,000 men."

" Then one of them will have a chance of surviving," said I, laughing. " In the meantime, put your sword in your sheath ! "

Our horses were standing head to tail, and the Bart put out his hand and patted me on the thigh.

" You're a good chap, Gerard," said he. " I only wish you had been born on the right side of the Channel."

" I was," said I.

" Poor devil ! " he cried, with such an earnestness of pity that he set me laughing again. " But look here, Gerard," he continued ; " this is all very well, but it is not business, you know. I don't know what Massena would say to it, but our Chief would jump out of his riding-boots if he saw us. We weren't sent out here for a picnic—either of us."

"What would you have?"

"Well, we had a little argument about our hussars and dragoons, if you remember. I've got fifty of the Sixteenth all chewing their carbine bullets behind me. You've got as many fine-looking boys over yonder, who seem to be fidgeting in their saddles. If you and I took the right flanks we should not spoil each other's beauty—though a little blood-letting is a friendly thing in this climate."

There seemed to me to be a good deal of sense in what he said. For the moment Mr. Alexis Morgan and the Countess of La Ronda and the Abbey of Almeixal went right out of my head, and I could only think of the fine level turf and of the beautiful skirmish which we might have.

"Very good, Bart," said I. "We have seen the front of your dragoons. We shall now have a look at their backs."

"Any betting?" he asked.

"The stake," said I, "is nothing less than the honour of the Hussars of Conflans."

"Well, come on!" he answered. "If we break you, well and good—if you break us, it will be all the better for Marshal Millefleurs."

When he said that I could only stare at him in astonishment.

"Why for Marshal Millefleurs?" I asked.

"It is the name of a rascal who lives out this way. My dragoons have been sent by Lord Wellington to see him safely hanged."

"Name of a name!" I cried. "Why, my hussars have been sent by Massena for that very object."

We burst out laughing at that, and sheathed our swords. There was a whirr of steel from behind us as our troopers followed our example.

"We are allies!" he cried.

"For a day."

"We must join forces."

"There is no doubt of it."

And so, instead of fighting, we wheeled our half squadrons round and moved in two little columns down the valley, the shakos and the helmets turned inwards, and the men looking their neighbours up and down, like old fighting dogs with tattered ears who have learned to respect each other's teeth. The most were on the broad grin, but there were some on either side who looked black and challenging, especially the English sergeant and my own sub-officer Papilette. They were men of habit, you see, who could not change all their ways of thinking in a moment. Besides, Papilette had lost his only brother at Busaco. As for the Bart and me, we rode together at the head and chatted about all that had occurred to us since that famous game of écarté of which I have told you.

For my own part, I spoke to him of my adventures in England. They are a very singular people, these English. Although he knew that I had been engaged in twelve campaigns, yet I am sure that the Bart thought more highly of me because I had had an affair with the Bristol Bustler. He told me, too, that the Colonel who presided over his court-martial for playing cards with a prisoner acquitted him of neglect of duty, but nearly broke him because he thought that he had not cleared his trumps before leading his suit. Yes, indeed, they are a singular people.

At the end of the valley the road curved over some rising ground before winding down into another wider valley beyond. We called a halt when we came to the top; for there, right in front of us, at the distance of about three miles, was a scattered, grey town, with a single enormous building upon the flank of the mountain which overlooked it. We could not doubt that we were at last in sight of the Abbey that held the gang of rascals whom we had come to disperse. It was only now, I think, that we fully understood what a task lay in front of us, for the place was a veritable fortress, and it was

evident that cavalry should never have been sent out upon such an errand.

"That's got nothing to do with us," said the Bart; "Wellington and Massena can settle that between them."

"Courage!" I answered. "Piré took Leipzig with fifty hussars."

"Had they been dragoons," said the Bart, laughing, "he would have had Berlin. But you are senior officer; give us a lead, and we'll see who will be the first to flinch."

"Well," said I, "whatever we do must be done at once, for my orders are to be on my way to Abrantes by to-morrow night. But we must have some information first, and here is someone who should be able to give it to us."

There was a square, whitewashed house standing by the roadside, which appeared, from the bush hanging over the door, to be one of those wayside tabernas which are provided for the muleteers. A lantern was hung in the porch, and by its light we saw two men, the one in the brown habit of a Capuchin monk, and the other girt with an apron, which showed him to be the landlord. They were conversing together so earnestly that we were upon them before they were aware of us. The innkeeper turned to fly, but one of the Englishmen seized him by the hair, and held him tight.

"For mercy's sake, spare me," he yelled. "My house has been gutted by the French, and harried by the English, and my feet have been burned by the brigands. I swear by the Virgin that I have neither money nor food in my inn, and the good Father Abbot, who is starving upon my doorstep, will be witness to it."

"Indeed, sir," said the Capuchin, in excellent French, "what this worthy man says is very true. He is one of the many victims to these cruel wars, although his loss is but a feather-weight compared to mine. Let him go," he added, in English, to the trooper, "he is too weak to fly, even if he desired to."

In the light of the lantern I saw that this monk was a magnificent man, dark and bearded, with the eyes of a hawk, and so tall that his cowl came up to Rataplan's ears. He wore the look of one who had been through much suffering, but he carried himself like a king, and we could form some opinion of his learning when we each heard him talk our own language as fluently as if he were born to it.

"You have nothing to fear," said I, to the trembling innkeeper. "As to you, father, you are, if I am not mistaken, the very man who can give us the information which we require."

"All that I have is at your service, my son. But," he added, with a wan smile, "my Lenten fare is always somewhat meagre, and this year it has been such that I must ask you for a crust of bread if I am to have the strength to answer your questions."

We bore two days' rations in our haversacks, so that he soon had the little he asked for. It was dreadful to see the wolfish wayin which he seized the piece of dried goat's flesh which I was able to offer him.

"Time presses, and we must come to the point," said I. "We want your advice as to the weak points of yonder Abbey, and concerning the habits of the rascals who infest it."

He cried out something which I took to be Latin, with his hands clasped and his eyes upturned. "The prayer of the just availeth much," said he, "and yet I had not dared to hope that mine would have been so speedily answered. In me you see the unfortunate Abbot of Almeixal, who has been cast out by this rabble of three armies with their heretical leader. Oh! to think of what I have lost!" his voice broke, and the tears hung upon his lashes.

"Cheer up, sir," said the Bart. "I'll lay nine to four that we have you back again by to-morrow night."

"It is not of my own welfare that I think," said he, "nor even of that of my poor, scattered flock. But it is

of the holy relics which are left in the sacrilegious hands of these robbers."

"It's even betting whether they would ever bother their heads about them," said the Bart. "But show us the way inside the gates, and we'll soon clear the place out for you."

In a few short words the good Abbot gave us the very points that we wished to know. But all that he said only made our task more formidable. The walls of the Abbey were forty feet high. The lower windows were barricaded, and the whole building loopholed for musketry fire. The gang preserved military discipline, and their sentries were too numerous for us to hope to take them by surprise. It was more than ever evident that a battalion of grenadiers and a couple of breaching pieces were what was needed. I raised my eyebrows, and the Bart began to whistle.

"We must have a shot at it, come what may," said he.

The men had already dismounted, and, having watered their horses, were eating their suppers. For my own part I went into the sitting-room of the inn with the Abbot and the Bart, that we might talk about our plans.

I had a little cognac in my *sauve vie*, and I divided it among us—just enough to wet our moustaches.

"It is unlikely," said I, "that those rascals know anything about our coming. I have seen no signs of scouts along the road. My own plan is that we should conceal ourselves in some neighbouring wood, and then, when they open their gates, charge down upon them and take them by surprise."

The Bart was of opinion that this was the best that we could do, but, when we came to talk it over, the Abbot made us see that there were difficulties in the way.

"Save on the side of the town, there is no place within a mile of the Abbey where you could shelter man or horse," said he. "As to the townsfolk, they are not to be trusted. I fear, my son, that your excellent plan

would have little chance of success in the face of the vigilant guard which these men keep."

"I see no other way," answered I. "Hussars of Conflans are not so plentiful that I can afford to run half a squadron of them against a forty-foot wall with five hundred infantry behind it."

"I am a man of peace," said the Abbot, "and yet I may, perhaps, give a word of counsel. I know these villains and their ways. Who should do so better, seeing that I have stayed for a month in this lonely spot, looking down in weariness of heart at the Abbey which was my own? I will tell you now what I should myself do if I were in your place."

"Pray tell us, father," we cried, both together.

"You must know that bodies of deserters, both French and English, are continually coming in to them, carrying their weapons with them. Now, what is there to prevent you and your men from pretending to be such a body, and so making your way into the Abbey?"

I was amazed at the simplicity of the thing, and I embraced the good Abbot. The Bart, however, had some objections to offer.

"That is all very well," said he, "but if these fellows are as sharp as you say, it is not very likely that they are going to let a hundred armed strangers into their crib. From all I have heard of Mr. Morgan, or Marshal Millefleurs, or whatever the rascal's name is, I give him credit for more sense than that."

"Well, then," I cried, "let us send fifty in, and let them at daybreak throw open the gates to the other fifty, who will be waiting outside."

We discussed the question at great length and with much foresight and discretion. If it had been Massena and Wellington instead of two young officers of light cavalry, we could not have weighed it all with more judgment. At last we agreed, the Bart and I, that one of us should indeed go with fifty men, under pretence of being deserters, and that in the early morning he should

gain command of the gate and admit the others. The Abbot, it is true, was still of opinion that it was dangerous to divide our force, but finding that we were both of the same mind, he shrugged his shoulders and gave in.

"There is only one thing that I would ask," said he. "If you lay hands upon this Marshal Millefleurs—this dog of a brigand—what will you do with him?"

"Hang him," I answered.

"It is too easy a death," cried the Capuchin, with a vindictive glow in his dark eyes. "Had I my way with him—but, oh, what thoughts are these for a servant of God to harbour!" He clapped his hands to his forehead like one who is half demented by his troubles, and rushed out of the room.

There was an important point which we had still to settle, and that was whether the French or the English party should have the honour of entering the Abbey first. My faith, it was asking a great deal of Étienne Gerard that he should give place to any man at such a time! But the poor Bart pleaded so hard, urging the few skirmishes which he had seen against my four-and-seventy engagements, that at last I consented that he should go. We had just clasped hands over the matter when there broke out such a shouting and cursing and yelling from the front of the inn, that out we rushed with our drawn sabres in our hands, convinced that the brigands were upon us.

You may imagine our feelings when, by the light of the lantern which hung from the porch, we saw a score of our hussars and dragoons all mixed in one wild heap, red coats and blue, helmets and busbies, pommelling each other to their hearts' content. We flung ourselves upon them, imploring, threatening, tugging at a lace collar, or at a spurred heel, until, at last, we had dragged them all apart. There they stood, flushed and bleeding, glaring at each other, and all panting together like a line of troop horses after a ten-mile chase. It was only with our drawn swords that we could keep them from each other's throats. The poor Capuchin stood in the porch

in his long brown habit, wringing his hands and calling upon all the saints for mercy.

He was, indeed, as I found upon inquiry, the innocent cause of all the turmoil, for, not understanding how soldiers look upon such things, he had made some remark to the English sergeant that it was a pity that his squadron was not as good as the French. The words were not out of his mouth before a dragoon knocked down the nearest hussar, and then, in a moment, they all flew at each other like tigers. We would trust them no more after that, but the Bart moved his men to the front of the inn, and I mine to the back, the English all scowling and silent, and our fellows shaking their fists and chattering, each after the fashion of their own people.

Well, as our plans were made, we thought it best to carry them out at once, lest some fresh cause of quarrel should break out between our followers. The Bart and his men rode off, therefore, he having first torn the lace from his sleeves, and the gorget and sash from his uniform, so that he might pass as a simple trooper. He explained to his men what it was that was expected of them, and though they did not raise a cry or wave their weapons as mine might have done, there was an expression upon their stolid and clean-shaven faces which filled me with confidence. Their tunics were left unbuttoned, their scabbards and helmets stained with dirt, and their harness badly fastened, so that they might look the part of deserters, without order or discipline. At six o'clock next morning they were to gain command of the main gate of the Abbey, while at that same hour my hussars were to gallop up to it from outside. The Bart and I pledged our words to it before he trotted off with his detachment. My sergeant, Papilette, with two troopers, followed the English at a distance, and returned in half an hour to say that, after some parley, and the flashing of lanterns upon them from the grille, they had been admitted into the Abbey.

So far, then, all had gone well. It was a cloudy night

with a sprinkling of rain, which was in our favour, as there was the less chance of our presence being discovered. My vedettes I placed two hundred yards in every direction, to guard against a surprise, and also to prevent any peasant who might stumble upon us from carrying the news to the Abbey. Oudin and Papilette were to take turns of duty, while the others with their horses had snug quarters in a great wooden granary. Having walked round and seen that all was as it should be, I flung myself upon the bed which the innkeeper had set apart for me, and fell into a dreamless sleep.

No doubt you have heard my name mentioned as being the beau-ideal of a soldier, and that not only by friends and admirers like our fellow-townsfolk, but also by old officers of the great wars who have shared the fortunes of those famous campaigns with me. Truth and modesty compel me to say, however, that this is not so. There are some gifts which I lack—very few, no doubt—but still, amid the vast armies of the Emperor there may have been some who were free from those blemishes which stood between me and perfection. Of bravery I say nothing. Those who have seen me in the field are best fitted to speak about that. I have often heard the soldiers discussing round the camp-fires as to who was the bravest man in the Grand Army. Some said Murat and some said Lasalle, and some Ney ; but for my own part, when they asked me, I merely shrugged my shoulders and smiled. It would have seemed mere conceit if I had answered that there was no man braver than Brigadier Gerard. At the same time, facts are facts, and a man knows best what his own feelings are. But there are other gifts besides bravery which are necessary for a soldier, and one of them is that he should be a light sleeper. Now, from my boyhood onwards, I have been hard to wake, and it was this which brought me to ruin upon that night.

It may have been about two o'clock in the morning that I was suddenly conscious of a feeling of suffocation.

I tried to call out, but there was something which prevented me from uttering a sound. I struggled to rise, but I could only flounder like a hamstrung horse. I was strapped at the ankles, strapped at the knees, and strapped again at the wrists. Only my eyes were free to move, and there at the foot of my couch, by the light of a Portuguese lamp, whom should I see but the Abbot and the innkeeper !

The latter's heavy, white face had appeared to me when I looked upon it the evening before to express nothing but stupidity and terror. Now, on the contrary, every feature bespoke brutality and ferocity. Never have I seen a more dreadful-looking villain. In his hand he held a long, dull-coloured knife. The Abbot, on the other hand, was as polished and as dignified as ever. His Capuchin gown had been thrown open, however, and I saw beneath it a black, frogged coat, such as I have seen among the English officers. As our eyes met he leaned over the wooden end of the bed and laughed silently until it creaked again.

"You will, I am sure, excuse my mirth, my dear Colonel Gerard," said he. "The fact is, that the expression upon your face when you grasped the situation was just a little funny. I have no doubt that you are an excellent soldier, but I hardly think that you are fit to measure wits with the Marshal Millefleurs, as your fellows have been good enough to call me. You appear to have given me credit for singularly little intelligence, which argues, if I may be allowed to say so, a want of acuteness upon your own part. Indeed, with the single exception of my thick-headed compatriot, the British dragoon, I have never met anyone who was less competent to carry out such a mission."

You can imagine how I felt and how I looked, as I listened to this insolent harangue, which was all delivered in that flowery and condescending manner which had gained this rascal his nickname. I could say nothing, but they must have read my threat in my eyes, for the

fellow who had played the part of the innkeeper whispered something to his companion.

" No, no, my dear Chenier, he will be infinitely more valuable alive," said he. " By the way, Colonel, it is just as well that you are a sound sleeper, for my friend here, who is a little rough in his ways, would certainly have cut your throat if you had raised any alarm. I should recommend you to keep in his good graces, for Sergeant Chenier, late of the 7th Imperial Light Infantry, is a much more dangerous person than Captain Alexis Morgan, of His Majesty's foot-guards."

Chenier grinned and shook his knife at me, while I tried to look the loathing which I felt at the thought that a soldier of the Emperor could fall so low.

" It may amuse you to know," said the Marshal, in that soft, suave voice of his, " that both your expeditions were watched from the time that you left your respective camps. I think that you will allow that Chenier and I played our parts with some subtlety. We had made every arrangement for your reception at the Abbey, though we had hoped to receive the whole squadron instead of half. When the gates are secured behind them, our visitors find themselves in a very charming little mediæval quadrangle, with no possible exit, commanded by musketry fire from a hundred windows. They may choose to be shot down ; or they may choose to surrender. Between ourselves, I have not the slightest doubt that they have been wise enough to do the latter. But since you are naturally interested in the matter, we thought that you would care to come with us and see for yourself. I think I can promise you that you will find your titled friend waiting for you at the Abbey with a face as long as your own."

The two villains began whispering together, debating, as far as I could hear, which was the best way of avoiding my vedettes.

" I will make sure that it is all clear upon the other side of the barn," said the Marshal at last. " You will

stay here, my good Chenier, and if the prisoner gives any trouble you will know what to do."

So we were left together, this murderous renegade and I—he sitting at the end of the bed, sharpening his knife upon his boot in the light of the single smoky little oil-lamp. As to me, I only wonder now, as I look back upon it, that I did not go mad with vexation and self-reproach as I lay helplessly upon the couch, unable to utter a word or move a finger, with the knowledge that my fifty gallant lads were so close to me, and yet with no means of letting them know the straits to which I was reduced. It was no new thing for me to be a prisoner; but to be taken by these renegades, and to be led into their Abbey in the midst of their jeers, befooled and outwitted by their insolent leaders—that was indeed more than I could endure. The knife of the butcher beside me would cut less deeply than that.

I twitched softly at my wrists, and then at my ankles, but whichever of the two had secured me was no bungler at his work. I could not move either of them an inch. Then I tried to work the handkerchief down over my mouth, but the ruffian beside me raised his knife with such a threatening snarl that I had to desist. I was lying still looking at his bull neck, and wondering whether it would ever be my good fortune to fit it for a cravat, when I heard returning steps coming down the inn passage and up the stairs. What word would the villain bring back? If he found it impossible to kidnap me, he would probably murder me where I lay. For my own part, I was indifferent which it might be, and I looked at the doorway with the contempt and defiance which I longed to put into words. But you can imagine my feelings, my dear friends, when, instead of the tall figure and dark, sneering face of the Capuchin, my eyes fell upon the grey pelisse and huge moustaches of my good little sub-officer, Papilette!

The French soldier of those days had seen too much to be ever taken by surprise. His eyes had hardly rested

upon my bound figure and the sinister face beside me before he had seen how the matter lay.

" Sacred name of a dog ! " he growled, and out flashed his great sabre. Chenier sprang forward at him with his knife, and then, thinking better of it, he darted back and stabbed frantically at my heart. For my own part, I had hurled myself off the bed on the side opposite to him, and the blade grazed my side before ripping its way through blanket and sheet. An instant later I heard the thud of a heavy fall, and then almost simultaneously a second object struck the floor—something lighter but harder, which rolled under the bed. I will not horrify you with details, my friends. Suffice it that Papilette was one of the strongest swordsmen in the regiment, and that his sabre was heavy and sharp. It left a red blotch upon my wrists and my ankles, as it cut the thongs which bound me.

When I had thrown off my gag, the first use which I made of my lips was to kiss the sergeant's scarred cheeks. The next was to ask him if all was well with the command. Yes, they had had no alarms. Oudin had just relieved him, and he had come to report. Had he seen the Abbot ? No, he had seen nothing of him. Then we must form a cordon and prevent his escape. I was hurrying out to give the orders, when I heard a slow and measured step enter the door below, and come creaking up the stairs.

Papilette understood it all in an instant. " You are not to kill him," I whispered, and thrust him into the shadow on one side of the door ; I crouched on the other. Up he came, up and up, and every footfall seemed to be upon my heart. The brown skirt of his gown was not over the threshold before we were both on him, like two wolves on a buck. Down we crashed, the three of us, he fighting like a tiger, and with such amazing strength that he might have broken away from the two of us. Thrice he got to his feet, and thrice we had him over again, until Papilette made him feel that there was a point to his sabre. He

had sense enough then to know that the game was up, and to lie still while I lashed him with the very cords which had been round my own limbs.

"There has been a fresh deal, my fine fellow," said I, "and you will find that I have some of the trumps in *my* hand this time."

"Luck always comes to the aid of a fool," he answered. "Perhaps it is as well, otherwise the world would fall too completely into the power of the astute. So, you have killed Chenier, I see. He was an insubordinate dog, and always smelt abominably of garlic. Might I trouble you to lay me upon the bed? The floor of these Portuguese tabernas is hardly a fitting couch for anyone who has prejudices in favour of cleanliness."

I could not but admire the coolness of the man, and the way in which he preserved the same insolent air of condescension in spite of this sudden turning of the tables. I dispatched Papilette to summon a guard, whilst I stood over our prisoner with my drawn sword, never taking my eyes off him for an instant, for I must confess that I had conceived a great respect for his audacity and resource.

"I trust," said he, "that your men will treat me in a becoming manner."

"You will get your deserts—you may depend upon that."

"I ask nothing more. You may not be aware of my exalted birth, but I am so placed that I cannot name my father without treason, nor my mother without a scandal. I cannot *claim* Royal honours, but these things are so much more graceful when they are conceded without a claim. The thongs are cutting my skin. Might I beg you to loosen them?"

"You do not give me credit for much intelligence," I remarked, repeating his own words.

"*Touché*," he cried, liked a pinked fencer. "But here come your men, so it matters little whether you loosen them or not."

I ordered the gown to be stripped from him and placed

him under a strong guard. Then, as morning was already breaking, I had to consider what my next step was to be. The poor Bart and his Englishmen had fallen victims to the deep scheme which might, had we adopted all the crafty suggestions of our adviser, have ended in the capture of the whole instead of the half of our force. I must extricate them if it were still possible. Then there was the old lady, the Countess of La Ronda, to be thought of. As to the Abbey, since its garrison was on the alert it was hopeless to think of capturing that. All turned now upon the value which they placed upon their leader. The game depended upon my playing that one card. I will tell you how boldly and how skilfully I played it.

It was hardly light before my bugler blew the assembly, and out we trotted on to the plain. My prisoner was placed on horseback in the very centre of the troops. It chanced that there was a large tree just out of musket-shot from the main gate of the Abbey, and under this we halted. Had they opened the great doors in order to attack us, I should have charged home upon them; but, as I had expected, they stood upon the defensive, lining the long wall and pouring down a torrent of hootings and taunts and derisive laughter upon us. A few fired their muskets, but finding that we were out of reach they soon ceased to waste their powder. It was the strangest sight to see that mixture of uniforms, French, English and Portuguese cavalry, infantry and artillery, all wagging their heads and shaking their fists at us.

My word, their hubbub soon died away when we opened our ranks, and showed whom we had got in the midst of us! There was silence for a few seconds, and then such a howl of rage and grief! I could see some of them dancing like madmen upon the wall. He must have been a singular person, this prisoner of ours, to have gained the affection of such a gang.

I had brought a rope from the inn, and we slung it over the lower bough of the tree.

"You will permit me, monsieur, to undo your collar," said Papilette, with mock politeness.

"If your hands are perfectly clean," answered our prisoner, and set the whole half-squadron laughing.

There was another yell from the wall, followed by a profound hush as the noose was tightened round Marshal Millefleurs' neck. Then came a shriek from a bugle, the Abbey gates flew open, and three men rushed out waving white cloths in their hands. Ah, how my heart bounded with joy at the sight of them. And yet I would not advance an inch to meet them, so that all the eagerness might seem to be upon their side. I allowed my trumpeter, however, to wave a handkerchief in reply, upon which the three envoys came running towards us. The Marshal, still pinioned, and with the rope round his neck, sat his horse with a half smile, as one who is slightly bored and yet strives out of courtesy not to show it. If I were in such a situation I could not wish to carry myself better, and surely I can say no more than that.

They were a singular trio, these ambassadors. The one was a Portuguese caçadore in his dark uniform, the second a French chasseur in the lightest green, and the third a big English artilleryman in blue and gold. They saluted, all three, and the Frenchman did the talking.

"We have thirty-seven English dragoons in our hands," said he. "We give you our most solemn oath that they shall all hang from the Abbey wall within five minutes of the death of our Marshal."

"Thirty-seven!" I cried. "You have fifty-one."

"Fourteen were cut down before they could be secured."

"And the officer?"

"He would not surrender his sword save with his life. It was not our fault. We would have saved him if we could."

Alas for my poor Bart! I had met him but twice, and yet he was a man very much after my heart. I have always had a regard for the English for the sake of that

one friend. A braver man and a worse swordsman I have never met.

I did not, as you may think, take these rascals' word for anything. Papilette was dispatched with one of them, and returned to say that it was too true. I had now to think of the living.

"You will release the thirty-seven dragoons if I free your leader?"

"We will give you ten of them."

"Up with him?" I cried.

"Twenty," shouted the chasseur.

"No more words," said I. "Pull on the rope!"

"All of them," cried the envoy, as the cord tightened round the Marshal's neck.

"With horses and arms?"

They could see that I was not a man to jest with.

"All complete," said the chasseur, sulkily.

"And the Countess of La Ronda as well?" said I.

But here I met with firmer opposition. No threats of mine could induce them to give up the Countess. We tightened the cord. We moved the horse. We did all but leave the Marshal suspended. If once I broke his neck the dragoons were dead men. It was as precious to me as to them.

"Allow me to remark," said the Marshal, blandly, "that you are exposing me to a risk of a quinsy. Do you not think, since there is a difference of opinion upon this point, that it would be an excellent idea to consult the lady herself? We would neither of us, I am sure, wish to override her own inclinations."

Nothing could be more satisfactory. You can imagine how quickly I grasped at so simple a solution. In ten minutes she was before us, a most stately dame, with her grey curls peeping out from under her mantilla. Her face was as yellow as though it reflected the countless doubloons of her treasury.

"This gentleman," said the Marshal, "is exceedingly anxious to convey you to a place where you will never see

us more. It is for you to decide whether you would wish to go with him, or whether you prefer to remain with me."

She was at his horse's side in an instant. "My own Alexis," she cried, "nothing can ever part us."

He looked at me with a sneer upon his handsome face.

"By the way, you made a small slip of the tongue, my dear Colonel," said he. "Except by courtesy, no such person exists as the Dowager Countess of La Ronda. The lady whom I have the honour to present to you is my very dear wife, Mrs. Alexis Morgan—or shall I say Madame la Maréchale Millefleurs?"

It was at this moment that I came to the conclusion that I was dealing with the cleverest, and also the most unscrupulous, man whom I had ever met. As I looked upon this unfortunate old woman my soul was filled with wonder and disgust. As for her, her eyes were raised to his face with such a look as a young recruit might give to the Emperor.

"So be it," said I at last; "give me the dragoons and let me go."

They were brought out with their horses and weapons, and the rope was taken from the Marshal's neck.

"Good-bye, my dear Colonel," said he. "I am afraid that you will have rather a lame account to give of your mission, when you find your way back to Massena, though, from all I hear, he will probably be too busy to think of you. I am free to confess that you have extricated yourself from your difficulties with greater ability than I had given you credit for. I presume that there is nothing which I can do for you before you go?"

"There is one thing."

"And that is?"

"To give fitting burial to this young officer and his men."

"I pledge my word to it."

"And there is one other."

"Name it."

"To give me five minutes in the open with a sword in your hand and a horse between your legs."

"Tut, tut!" said he. "I should either have to cut short your promising career, or else to bid adieu to my own bonny bride. It is unreasonable to ask such a request of a man in the first joys of matrimony."

I gathered my horsemen together and wheeled them into column.

"Au revoir," I cried, shaking my sword at him. "The next time you may not escape so easily."

"Au revoir," he answered. "When you are weary of the Emperor, you will always find a commission waiting for you in the service of the Marshal Millefleurs."

6. *How the Brigadier played for a Kingdom*

IT has sometimes struck me that some of you, when you have heard me tell these little adventures of mine, may have gone away with the impression that I was conceited. There could not be a greater mistake than this, for I have always observed that really fine soldiers are free from this failing. It is true that I have had to depict myself sometimes as brave, sometimes as full of resource, always as interesting; but, then, it really was so, and I had to take the facts as I found them. It would be an unworthy affectation if I were to pretend that my career has been anything but a fine one. The incident which I will tell you to-night, however, is one which you will understand that only a modest man would describe. After all, when one has attained such a position as mine, one can afford to speak of what an ordinary man might be tempted to conceal.

You must know, then, that after the Russian campaign the remains of our poor army were quartered along the western bank of the Elbe, where they might thaw their frozen blood and try, with the help of the good German

beer, to put a little between their skin and their bones. There were some things which we could not hope to regain, for I dare say that three large commissariat fourgons would not have sufficed to carry the fingers and the toes which the army had shed during that retreat. Still, lean and crippled as we were, we had much to be thankful for when we thought of our poor comrades whom we had left behind, and of the snowfields—the horrible, horrible snowfields. To this day, my friends, I do not care to see red and white together. Even my red cap thrown down upon my white counterpane has given me dreams in which I have seen those monstrous plains, the reeling, tortured army, and the crimson smears which glared upon the snow behind them. You will coax no story out of me about that business, for the thought of it is enough to turn my wine to vinegar and my tobacco to straw.

Of the half-million who crossed the Elbe in the autumn of the year '12, about forty thousand infantry were left in the spring of '13. But they were terrible men, these forty thousand: men of iron, eaters of horses, and sleepers in the snow; filled, too, with rage and bitterness against the Russians. They would hold the Elbe until the great army of conscripts, which the Emperor was raising in France, should be ready to help them to cross it once more.

But the cavalry was in a deplorable condition. My own hussars were at Borna, and when I paraded them first, I burst into tears at the sight of them. My fine men and my beautiful horses—it broke my heart to see the state to which they were reduced. "But, courage," I thought, "they have lost much, but their Colonel is still left to them." I set to work, therefore, to repair their disasters, and had already constructed two good squadrons, when an order came that all colonels of cavalry should repair instantly to the depôts of the regiments in France to organise the recruits and the remounts for the coming campaign.

You will think, doubtless, that I was overjoyed at

this chance of visiting home once more. I will not deny that it was a pleasure to me to know that I should see my mother again, and there were a few girls who would be very glad at the news ; but there were others in the army who had a stronger claim. I would have given my place to any who had wives and children whom they might not see again. However, there is no arguing when the blue paper with the little red seal arrives, so within an hour I was off upon my great ride from the Elbe to the Vosges. At last I was to have a period of quiet. War lay behind my mare's tail and peace in front of her nostrils. So I thought, as the sound of the bugles died in the distance, and the long, white road curled away in front of me through plain and forest and mountain, with France somewhere beyond the blue haze which lay upon the horizon.

It is interesting, but it is also fatiguing, to ride in the rear of an army. In the harvest time our soldiers could do without supplies, for they had been trained to pluck the grain in the fields as they passed, and to grind it for themselves in their bivouacs. It was at that time of year, therefore, that those swift marches were performed which were the wonder and the despair of Europe. But now the starving men had to be made robust once more, and I was forced to draw into the ditch continually as the Coburg sheep and the Bavarian bullocks came streaming past with waggon loads of Berlin beer and good French cognac. Sometimes, too, I would hear the dry rattle of the drums and the shrill whistle of the fifes, and long columns of our good little infantry men would swing past me with the white dust lying thick upon their blue tunics. These were old soldiers drawn from the garrisons of our German fortresses, for it was not until May that the new conscripts began to arrive from France.

Well, I was rather tired of this eternal stopping and dodging, so that I was not sorry when I came to Altenburg to find that the road divided, and that I could take the southern and quieter branch. There were few way-

farers between there and Greiz, and the road wound through groves of oaks and beeches, which shot their branches across the path. You will think it strange that a Colonel of hussars should again and again pull up his horse in order to admire the beauty of the feathery branches and the little, green, new-budded leaves, but if you had spent six months among the fir trees of Russia you would be able to understand me.

There was something, however, which pleased me very much less than the beauty of the forests, and that was the words and looks of the folk who lived in the woodland villages. We had always been excellent friends with the Germans, and during the last six years they had never seemed to bear us any malice for having made a little free with their country. We had shown kindnesses to the men and received them from the women, so that good, comfortable Germany was a second home to all of us. But now there was something which I could not understand in the behaviour of the people. The travellers made no answer to my salute ; the foresters turned their heads away to avoid seeing me ; and in the villages the folk would gather into knots in the roadway and would scowl at me as I passed. Even women would do this, and it was something new for me in those days to see anything but a smile in a woman's eyes when they were turned upon me.

It was in the hamlet of Schmolin, just ten miles out of Altenburg, that the thing became most marked. I had stopped at the little inn there just to damp my moustache and to wash the dust out of poor Violette's throat. It was my way to give some little compliment, or possibly a kiss, to the maid who served me ; but this one would have neither the one nor the other, but darted a glance at me like a bayonet-thrust. Then when I raised my glass to the folk who drank their beer by the door they turned their backs on me, save only one fellow, who cried, " Here's a toast for you, boys ! Here's to the letter T ! " At that they all emptied their beer mugs

and laughed; but it was not a laugh that had good-fellowship in it.

I was turning this over in my head and wondering what their boorish conduct could mean, when I saw, as I rode from the village, a great T new carved upon a tree. I had already seen more than one in my morning's ride, but I had given no thought to them until the words of the beer-drinker gave them an importance. It chanced that a respectable-looking person was riding past me at the moment, so I turned to him for information.

"Can you tell me, sir," said I, "what this letter T is?"

He looked at it and then at me in the most singular fashion. "Young man," said he, "it is not the letter N." Then before I could ask further he clapped his spurs into his horse's ribs and rode, stomach to earth, upon his way.

At first his words had no particular significance in my mind, but as I trotted onwards Violette chanced to half turn her dainty head, and my eyes were caught by the gleam of the brazen N's at the end of the bridle-chain. It was the Emperor's mark. And those T's meant something which was opposite to it. Things had been happening in Germany, then, during our absence, and the giant sleeper had begun to stir. I thought of the mutinous faces that I had seen, and I felt that if I could only have looked into the hearts of these people I might have had some strange news to bring into France with me. It made me the more eager to get my remounts, and to see ten strong squadrons behind my kettle-drums once more.

While these thoughts were passing through my head I had been alternately walking and trotting, as a man should who has a long journey before, and a willing horse beneath, him. The woods were very open at this point, and beside the road there lay a great heap of fagots. As I passed there came a sharp sound from among them, and, glancing round, I saw a face looking out at me—a

hot, red face, like that of a man who is beside himself with excitement and anxiety. A second glance told me that it was the very person with whom I had talked an hour before in the village.

"Come nearer!" he hissed. "Nearer still! Now dismount and pretend to be mending the stirrup leather. Spies may be watching us, and it means death to me if I am seen helping you."

"Death!" I whispered. "From whom?"

"From the Tugendbund. From Lutzow's night-riders. You Frenchmen are living on a powder magazine, and the match has been struck that will fire it."

"But this is all strange to me," said I, still fumbling at the leathers of my horse. "What is this Tugendbund?"

"It is the secret society which has planned the great rising which is to drive you out of Germany, just as you have been driven out of Russia."

"And these T's stand for it?"

"They are the signal. I should have told you all this in the village, but I dared not be seen speaking with you. I galloped through the woods to cut you off, and concealed both my horse and myself."

"I am very much indebted to you," said I, "and the more so as you are the only German that I have met to-day from whom I have had common civility."

"All that I possess I have gained through contracting for the French armies," said he. "Your Emperor has been a good friend to me. But I beg that you will ride on now, for we have talked long enough. Beware only of Lutzow's night-riders!"

"Banditti?" I asked.

"All that is best in Germany," said he. "But for God's sake ride forwards, for I have risked my life and exposed my good name in order to carry you this warning."

Well, if I had been heavy with thought before, you can think how I felt after my strange talk with the man among

the fagots. What came home to me even more than his words was his shivering, broken voice, his twitching face, and his eyes glancing swiftly to right and left, and opening in horror whenever a branch cracked upon a tree. It was clear that he was in the last extremity of terror, and it is possible that he had cause, for shortly after I had left him I heard a distant gunshot and a shouting from somewhere behind me. It may have been some sportsman halloaing to his dogs, but I never again heard of or saw the man who had given me my warning.

I kept a good look-out after this, riding swiftly where the country was open, and slowly where there might be an ambuscade. It was serious for me, since 500 good miles of German soil lay in front of me; but somehow I did not take it very much to heart, for the Germans had always seemed to me to be a kindly, gentle people, whose hands closed more readily round a pipe-stem than a sword-hilt—not out of want of valour, you understand, but because they are genial, open souls, who would rather be on good terms with all men. I did not know then that beneath that homely surface there lurks a devilry as fierce as, and far more persistent than, that of the Castilian or the Italian.

And it was not long before I had shown to me that there was something more serious abroad than rough words and hard looks. I had come to a spot where the road runs upwards through a wild tract of heathland and vanishes into an oak wood. I may have been half-way up the hill when, looking forward, I saw something gleaming under the shadow of the tree-trunks, and a man came out with a coat which was so slashed and spangled with gold that he blazed like a fire in the sunlight. He appeared to be very drunk, for he reeled and staggered as he came towards me. One of his hands was held up to his ear and clutched a great red handkerchief, which was fixed to his neck.

I had reined up the mare and was looking at him with some disgust, for it seemed strange to me that one who

wore so gorgeous a uniform should show himself in such a state in broad daylight. For his part, he looked hard in my direction and came slowly onwards, stopping from time to time and swaying about as he gazed at me. Suddenly, as I again advanced, he screamed out his thanks to Christ, and, lurching forwards, he fell with a crash upon the dusty road. His hands flew forward with the fall, and I saw that what I had taken for a red cloth was a monstrous wound, which had left a great gap in his neck, from which a dark blood-clot hung, like an epaulette upon his shoulder.

"My God!" I cried, as I sprang to his aid. "And I thought that you were drunk!"

"Not drunk, but dying," said he. "But thank Heaven that I have seen a French officer while I have still strength to speak."

I laid him among the heather and poured some brandy down his throat. All round us was the vast country-side, green and peaceful, with nothing living in sight save only the mutilated man beside me.

"Who has done this?" I asked, "and what are you? You are French, and yet the uniform is strange to me."

"It is that of the Emperor's new guard of honour. I am the Marquis of Château St. Arnaud, and I am the ninth of my blood who has died in the service of France. I have been pursued and wounded by the night-riders of Lutzow, but I hid among the brushwood yonder, and waited in the hope that a Frenchman might pass. I could not be sure at first if you were friend or foe, but I felt that death was very near, and that I must take the chance."

"Keep your heart up, comrade," said I; "I have seen a man with a worse wound who has lived to boast of it."

"No, no," he whispered; "I am going fast." He laid his hand upon mine as he spoke, and I saw that his finger-nails were already blue. "But I have papers here in my tunic which you must carry at once to the

Prince of Saxe-Felstein, at his Castle of Hof. He is still true to us, but the Princess is our deadly enemy. She is striving to make him declare against us. If he does so, it will determine all those who are wavering, for the King of Prussia is his uncle and the King of Bavaria his cousin. These papers will hold him to us if they can only reach him before he takes the last step. Place them in his hands to-night, and, perhaps, you will have saved all Germany for the Emperor. Had my horse not been shot, I might, wounded as I am——" he choked, and the cold hand tightened into a grip, which left mine as bloodless as itself. Then, with a groan, his head jerked back, and it was all over with him.

Here was a fine start for my journey home. I was left with a commission of which I knew little, which would lead me to delay the pressing needs of my hussars, and which at the same time was of such importance that it was impossible for me to avoid it. I opened the Marquis's tunic, the brilliance of which had been devised by the Emperor in order to attract those young aristocrats from whom he hoped to raise these new regiments of his Guard. It was a small packet of papers which I drew out, tied up with silk, and addressed to the Prince of Saxe-Felstein. In the corner, in a sprawling, untidy hand, which I knew to be the Emperor's own, was written: "Pressing and most important." It was an order to me, those four words—an order as clear as if it had come straight from the firm lips with the cold grey eyes looking into mine. My troopers might wait for their horses, the dead Marquis might lie where I had laid him amongst the heather, but if the mare and her rider had a breath left in them the papers should reach the Prince that night.

I should not have feared to ride by the road through the wood, for I have learned in Spain that the safest time to pass through a guerrilla country is after an outrage, and that the moment of danger is when all is peaceful. When I came to look upon my map, however, I saw that

Hof lay further to the south of me, and that I might reach it more directly by keeping to the moors. Off I set, therefore, and had not gone fifty yards before two carbine shots rang out of the brushwood and a bullet hummed past me like a bee. It was clear that the night-riders were bolder in their ways than the brigands of Spain, and that my mission would have ended where it had begun if I had kept to the road.

It was a mad ride, that—a ride with a loose rein, girth-deep in heather and in gorse, plunging through bushes, flying down hill-sides, with my neck at the mercy of my dear little Violette. But she—she never slipped, she never faltered, as swift and as surefooted as if she knew that her rider carried the fate of all Germany beneath the buttons of his pelisse. And I—I had long borne the name of being the best horseman in the six brigades of light cavalry, but I never rode as I rode then. My friend the Bart has told me of how they hunt the fox in England, but the swiftest fox would have been captured by me that day. The wild pigeons which flew overhead did not take a straighter course than Violette and I below. As an officer, I have always been ready to sacrifice myself for my men, though the Emperor would not have thanked me for it, for he had many men, but only one—well, cavalry leaders of the first class are rare.

But here I had an object which was indeed worth a sacrifice, and I thought no more of my life than of the clods of earth that flew from my darling's heels.

We struck the road once more as the light was failing, and galloped into the little village of Lobenstein. But we had hardly got upon the cobble-stones when off came one of the mare's shoes, and I had to lead her to the village smithy. His fire was low, and his day's work done, so that it would be an hour at the least before I could hope to push on to Hof. Cursing at the delay, I strode into the village inn and ordered a cold chicken and some wine to be served for my dinner. It was but a few miles to Hof, and I had every hope that I might deliver

my papers to the Prince on that very night, and be on my way for France next morning with dispatches for the Emperor in my bosom. I will tell you now what befell me in the inn of Lobenstein.

The chicken had been served and the wine drawn, and I had turned upon both as a man may who has ridden such a ride, when I was aware of a murmur and a scuffling in the hall outside my door. At first I thought that it was some brawl between peasants in their cups, and I left them to settle their own affairs. But of a sudden there broke from among the low, sullen growl of the voices such a sound as would send Étienne Gerard leaping from his death-bed. It was the whimpering cry of a woman in pain. Down clattered my knife and my fork, and in an instant I was in the thick of the crowd which had gathered outside my door.

The heavy-cheeked landlord was there and his flaxen-haired wife, the two men from the stables, a chamber-maid and two or three villagers. All of them, women and men, were flushed and angry, while there in the centre of them, with pale cheeks and terror in her eyes, stood the loveliest woman that ever a soldier would wish to look upon. With her queenly head thrown back, and a touch of defiance mingled with her fear, she looked as she gazed round her like a creature of a different race from the vile, coarse-featured crew who surrounded her. I had not taken two steps from my door before she sprang to meet me, her hand resting upon my arm and her blue eyes sparkling with joy and triumph.

"A French soldier and gentleman!" she cried. "Now at last I am safe."

"Yes, madam, you are safe," said I, and I could not resist taking her hand in mine in order that I might re-assure her. "You have only to command me," I added, kissing the hand as a sign that I meant what I was saying.

"I am Polish," she cried; "the Countess Palotta is my name. They abuse me because I love the French.

I do not know what they might have done to me had Heaven not sent you to my help."

I kissed her hand again lest she should doubt my intentions. Then I turned upon the crew with such an expression as I know how to assume. In an instant the hall was empty.

"Countess," said I, "you are now under my protection. You are faint, and a glass of wine is necessary to restore you." I offered her my arm and escorted her into my room, where she sat by my side at the table and took the refreshment which I offered her.

How she blossomed out in my presence, this woman, like a flower before the sun! She lit up the room with her beauty. She must have read my admiration in my eyes, and it seemed to me that I also could see something of the sort in her own. Ah! my friends, I was no ordinary-looking man when I was in my thirtieth year. In the whole light cavalry it would have been hard to find a finer pair of whiskers. Murat's may have been a shade longer, but the best judges are agreed that Murat's were a shade too long. And then I had a manner. Some women are to be approached in one way and some in another, just as a siege is an affair of fascines and gabions in hard weather and of trenches in soft. But the man who can mix daring with timidity, who can be outrageous with an air of humility, and presumptuous with a tone of deference, that is the man whom mothers have to fear. For myself, I felt that I was the guardian of this lonely lady, and knowing what a dangerous man I had to deal with, I kept strict watch upon myself. Still, even a guardian has his privileges, and I did not neglect them.

But her talk was as charming as her face. In a few words she explained that she was travelling to Poland, and that her brother who had been her escort had fallen ill upon the way. She had more than once met with ill-treatment from the country folk because she could not conceal her good-will towards the French. Then turning from her own affairs she questioned me about the army, and so

came round to myself and my own exploits. They were familiar to her, she said, for she knew several of Poniatowski's officers, and they had spoken of my doings. Yet she would be glad to hear them from my own lips. Never have I had so delightful a conversation. Most women make the mistake of talking rather too much about their own affairs, but this one listened to my tales just as you are listening now, ever asking for more and more and more. The hours slipped rapidly by, and it was with horror that I heard the village clock strike eleven, and so learned that for four hours I had forgotten the Emperor's business.

"Pardon me, my dear lady," I cried, springing to my feet, "but I must on instantly to Hof."

She rose also, and looked at me with a pale, reproachful face. "And me?" she said. "What is to become of me?"

"It is the Emperor's affair. I have already stayed far too long. My duty calls me, and I must go."

"You must go? And I must be abandoned alone to these savages? Oh, why did I ever meet you? Why did you ever teach me to rely upon your strength?" Her eyes glazed over, and in an instant she was sobbing upon my bosom.

Here was a trying moment for a guardian! Here was a time when he had to keep a watch upon a forward young officer. But I was equal to it. I smoothed her rich brown hair and whispered such consolations as I could think of in her ear, with one arm round her, it is true, but that was to hold her lest she should faint. She turned her tear-stained face to mine. "Water," she whispered. "For God's sake, water!"

I saw that in another moment she would be senseless. I laid the drooping head upon the sofa, and then rushed furiously from the room, hunting from chamber to chamber for a carafe. It was some minutes before I could get one and hurry back with it. You can imagine my feelings to find the room empty and the lady gone.

Not only was she gone, but her cap and silver-mounted riding switch which had lain upon the table were gone also. I rushed out and roared for the landlord. He knew nothing of the matter, had never seen the woman before, and did not care if he never saw her again. Had the peasants at the door seen anyone ride away? No, they had seen nobody. I searched here and searched there, until at last I chanced to find myself in front of a mirror, where I stood with my eyes staring and my jaw as far dropped as the chin-strap of my shako would allow.

Four buttons of my pelisse were open, and it did not need me to put my hand up to know that my precious papers were gone. Oh! the depth of cunning that lurks in a woman's heart. She had robbed me, this creature, robbed me as she clung to my breast. Even while I smoothed her hair, and whispered kind words into her ear, her hands had been at work beneath my dolman. And here I was, at the very last step of my journey, without the power of carrying out this mission which had already deprived one good man of his life, and was likely to rob another one of his credit. What would the Emperor say when he heard that I had lost his dispatches? Would the army believe it of Étienne Gerard? And when they heard that a woman's hand had coaxed them from me, what laughter there would be at mess-table and at camp-fire! I could have rolled upon the ground in my despair.

But one thing was certain—all this affair of the fracas in the hall and the persecution of the so-called Countess was a piece of acting from the beginning. This villainous innkeeper must be in the plot. From him I might learn who she was and where my papers had gone. I snatched my sabre from the table and rushed out in search of him. But the scoundrel had guessed what I would do, and had made his preparations for me. It was in the corner of the yard that I found him, a blunderbuss in his hands and a mastiff held upon a leash by his son. The two stable-hands, with pitchforks, stood upon either side,

and the wife held a great lantern behind him, so as to guide his aim.

"Ride away, sir, ride away!" he cried, with a crackling voice. "Your horse is at the door, and no one will meddle with you if you go your way; but if you come against us, you are alone against three brave men."

I had only the dog to fear, for the two forks and the blunderbuss were shaking about like branches in a wind. Still, I considered that, though I might force an answer with my sword-point at the throat of this fat rascal, still I should have no means of knowing whether that answer was the truth. It would be a struggle, then, with much to lose and nothing certain to gain. I looked them up and down, therefore, in a way that set their foolish weapons shaking worse than ever, and then, throwing myself upon my mare, I galloped away with the shrill laughter of the landlady jarring upon my ears.

I had already formed my resolution. Although I had lost my papers, I could make a very good guess as to what their contents would be, and this I would say from my own lips to the Prince of Saxe-Felstein, as though the Emperor had commissioned me to convey it in that way. It was a bold stroke and a dangerous one, but if I went too far I could afterwards be disavowed. It was that or nothing, and when all Germany hung on the balance the game should not be lost if the nerve of one man could save it.

It was midnight when I rode into Hof, but every window was blazing, which was enough in itself, in that sleepy country, to tell the ferment of excitement in which the people were. There was hooting and jeering as I rode through the crowded streets, and once a stone sang past my head, but I kept upon my way, neither slowing nor quickening my pace, until I came to the palace. It was lit from base to battlement, and the dark shadows, coming and going against the yellow glare, spoke of the turmoil within. For my part, I handed my mare to a groom at the gate, and striding in I demanded, in such a

voice as an ambassador should have, to see the Prince instantly, upon business which would brook no delay.

The hall was dark, but I was conscious as I entered of a buzz of innumerable voices, which hushed into silence as I loudly proclaimed my mission. Some great meeting was being held then—a meeting which, as my instincts told me, was to decide this very question of war and peace. It was possible that I might still be in time to turn the scale for the Emperor and for France. As to the major-domo, he looked blackly at me, and showing me into a small ante-chamber he left me. A minute later he returned to say that the Prince could not be disturbed at present, but that the Princess would take my message.

The Princess! What use was there in giving it to her? Had I not been warned that she was German in heart and soul, and that it was she who was turning her husband and her State against us?

"It is the Prince that I must see," said I.

"Nay, it is the Princess," said a voice at the door, and a woman swept into the chamber. "Von Rosen, you had best stay with us. Now, sir, what is it that you have to say to either Prince or Princess of Saxe-Felstein?"

At the first sound of the voice I had sprung to my feet. At the first glance I had thrilled with anger. Not twice in a lifetime does one meet that noble figure, that queenly head, and those eyes as blue as the Garonne, and as chilling as her winter waters.

"Time presses, sir!" she cried, with an impatient tap of her foot. "What have you to say to me?"

"What have I to say to you?" I cried. "What can I say, save that you have taught me never to trust a woman more? You have ruined and dishonoured me for ever."

She looked with arched brows at her attendant.

"Is this the raving of fever, or does it come from some less innocent cause?" said she. "Perhaps a little blood-letting——"

"Ah, you can act!" I cried. "You have shown me that already."

"Do you mean that we have met before?"

"I mean that you have robbed me within the last two hours."

"This is past all bearing," she cried, with an admirable affectation of anger. "You claim, as I understand, to be an ambassador, but there are limits to the privileges which such an office brings with it."

"You brazen it admirably," said I. "Your Highness will not make a fool of me twice in one night." I sprang forward and, stooping down, caught up the hem of her dress. "You would have done well to change it after you had ridden so far and so fast," said I.

It was like the dawn upon a snow-peak to see her ivory cheeks flush suddenly to crimson.

"Insolent!" she cried, "Call the foresters and have him thrust from the palace!"

"I will see the Prince first."

"You will never see the Prince. Ah! Hold him, Von Rosen, hold him!"

She had forgotten the man with whom she had to deal —was it likely that I would wait until they could bring their rascals? She had shown me her cards too soon. Her game was to stand between me and her husband. Mine was to speak face to face with him at any cost. One spring took me out of the chamber. In another I had crossed the hall. An instant later I had burst into the great room from which the murmur of the meeting had come. At the far end I saw a figure upon a high chair under a daïs. Beneath him was a line of high dignitaries, and then on every side I saw vaguely the heads of a vast assembly. Into the centre of the room I strode, my sabre clanking, my shako under my arm.

"I am the messenger of the Emperor," I shouted. "I bear his message to His Highness the Prince of Saxe-Felstein."

The man beneath the daïs raised his head, and I saw

that his face was thin and wan, and that his back was bowed as though some huge burden was balanced between his shoulders.

"Your name, sir?" he asked.

"Colonel Étienne Gerard, of the Third Hussars."

Every face in the gathering was turned upon me, and I heard the rustle of the innumerable necks and saw countless eyes without meeting one friendly one amongst them. The woman had swept past me, and was whispering, with many shakes of her head and dartings of her hands, into the Prince's ear. For my own part I threw out my chest and curled my moustache, glancing round in my own debonair fashion at the assembly. They were men, all of them, professors from the college, a sprinkling of their students, soldiers, gentlemen, artisans, all very silent and serious. In one corner there sat a group of men in black, with riding-coats drawn over their shoulders. They leaned their heads to each other, whispering under their breath, and with every movement I caught the clank of their sabres or the clink of their spurs.

"The Emperor's private letter to me informs me that it is the Marquis Château St. Arnaud who is bearing his dispatches," said the Prince.

"The Marquis has been foully murdered," I answered, and a buzz rose up from the people as I spoke. Many heads were turned, I noticed, towards the dark men in the cloaks.

"Where are your papers?" asked the Prince.

"I have none."

A fierce clamour rose instantly around me. "He is a spy! He plays a part!" they cried. "Hang him!" roared a deep voice from the corner, and a dozen others took up the shout. For my part, I drew out my handkerchief and flicked the dust from the fur of my pelisse. The Prince held out his thin hands, and the tumult died away.

"Where, then, are your credentials, and what is your message?"

" My uniform is my credential, and my message is for your private ear."

He passed his hand over his forehead with the gesture of a weak man who is at his wits' end what to do. The Princess stood beside him with her hand upon his throne, and again whispered in his ear.

" We are here in council together, some of my trusty subjects and myself," said he. " I have no secrets from them, and whatever message the Emperor may send to me at such a time concerns their interests no less than mine."

There was a hum of applause at this, and every eye was turned once more upon me. My faith, it was an awkward position in which I found myself, for it is one thing to address eight hundred hussars, and another to speak to such an audience on such a subject. But I fixed my eyes upon the Prince, and tried to say just what I should have said if we had been alone, shouting it out, too, as though I had my regiment on parade.

" You have often expressed friendship for the Emperor," I cried. " It is now at last that this friendship is about to be tried. If you will stand firm, he will reward you as only he can reward. It is an easy thing for him to turn a Prince into a King and a province into a power. His eyes are fixed upon you, and though you can do little to harm him, you can ruin yourself. At this moment he is crossing the Rhine with two hundred thousand men. Every fortress in the country is in his hands. He will be upon you in a week, and if you have played him false, God help both you and your people. You think that he is weakened because a few of us got the chilblains last winter. Look there ! " I cried, pointing to a great star which blazed through the window above the Prince's head. " That is the Emperor's star. When it wanes, he will wane—but not before."

You would have been proud of me, my friends, if you could have seen and heard me, for I clashed my sabre as I spoke, and swung my dolman as though my regiment

was picketed outside in the courtyard. They listened to me in silence, but the back of the Prince bowed more and more as though the burden which weighed upon it was greater than his strength. He looked round with haggard eyes.

"We have heard a Frenchman speak for France," said he. "Let us have a German speak for Germany."

The folk glanced at each other, and whispered to their neighbours. My speech, as I think, had its effect, and no man wished to be the first to commit himself in the eyes of the Emperor. The Princess looked round her with blazing eyes, and her clear voice broke the silence.

"Is a woman to give this Frenchman his answer?" she cried. "Is it possible, then, that among the night-riders of Lutzow, there is none who can use his tongue as well as his sabre?"

Over went a table with a crash, and a young man had bounded upon one of the chairs. He had the face of one inspired—pale, eager, with wild hawk eyes, and tangled hair. His sword hung straight from his side, and his riding-boots were brown with mire.

"It is Korner!" the people cried. "It is young Korner, the poet! Ah, he will sing, he will sing."

And he sang! It was soft, at first, and dreamy, telling of old Germany, the mother of nations, of the rich, warm plains, and the grey cities, and the fame of dead heroes. But then verse after verse rang like a trumpet-call. It was of the Germany of now, the Germany which had been taken unawares and overthrown, but which was up again, and snapping the bonds upon her giant limbs. What was life that one should covet it? What was glorious death that one should shun it? The mother, the great mother, was calling. Her sigh was in the night wind. She was crying to her own children for help. Would they come? Would they come? Would they come?

Ah, that terrible song, the spirit face and the ringing voice! Where were I, and France, and the Emperor?

They did not shout, these people—they howled. They were up on the chairs and the tables. They were raving, sobbing, the tears running down their faces. Korner had sprung from the chair, and his comrades were round him with their sabres in the air. A flush had come into the pale face of the Prince, and he rose from his throne.

"Colonel Gerard," said he, "you have heard the answer which you are to carry to your Emperor. The die is cast, my children. Your Prince and you must stand or fall together."

He bowed to show that all was over, and the people with a shout made for the door to carry the tidings into the town. For my own part, I had done all that a brave man might, and so I was not sorry to be carried out amid the stream. Why should I linger in the palace? I had had my answer and must carry it, such as it was. I wished neither to see Hof nor its people again until I entered it at the head of a vanguard. I turned from the throng, then, and walked silently and sadly in the direction in which they had led the mare.

It was dark down there by the stables, and I was peering round for the ostler, when suddenly my two arms were seized from behind. There were hands at my wrists and at my throat, and I felt the cold muzzle of a pistol under my ear.

"Keep your lips closed, you French dog," whispered a fierce voice. "We have him, captain."

"Have you the bridle?"

"Here it is."

"Sling it over his head."

I felt the cold coil of leather tighten round my neck. An ostler with a stable lantern had come out and was gazing upon the scene. In its dim light I saw stern faces breaking everywhere through the gloom, with the black caps and dark cloaks of the night-riders.

"What would you do with him, captain?" cried a voice.

"Hang him at the palace gate."

"An ambassador?"

"An ambassador without papers."

"But the Prince?"

"Tut, man, do you not see that the Prince will then be committed to our side? He will be beyond all hope of forgiveness. At present he may swing round to-morrow as he has done before. He may eat his words, but a dead hussar is more than he can explain."

"No, no, Von Strelitz, we cannot do it," said another voice.

"Can we not? I shall show you that!" and there came a jerk on the bridle which nearly pulled me to the ground. At the same instant a sword flashed and the leather was cut through within two inches of my neck.

"By Heaven, Korner, this is rank mutiny," cried the captain. "You may hang yourself before you are through with it."

"I have drawn my sword as a soldier and not as a brigand," said the young poet. "Blood may dim its blade, but never dishonour. Comrades, will you stand by and see this gentleman mishandled?"

A dozen sabres flew from their sheaths, and it was evident that my friends and my foes were about equally balanced. But the angry voices and the gleam of steel had brought the folk running from all parts.

"The Princess!" they cried. "The Princess is coming!"

And even as they spoke I saw her in front of us, her sweet face framed in the darkness. I had cause to hate her, for she had cheated and befooled me, and yet it thrilled me then and thrills me now to think that my arms have embraced her, and that I have felt the scent of her hair in my nostrils. I know not whether she lies under her German earth, or whether she still lingers, a grey-haired woman in her Castle of Hof, but she lives ever, young and lovely, in the heart and memory of Étienne Gerard.

"For shame!" she cried, sweeping up to me, and

tearing with her own hands the noose from my neck. "You are fighting in God's own quarrel, and yet you would begin with such a devil's deed as this. This man is mine, and he who touches a hair of his head will answer for it to me."

They were glad enough to slink off into the darkness before those scornful eyes. Then she turned once more to me.

"You can follow me, Colonel Gerard," she said. "I have a word that I would speak to you."

I walked behind her to the chamber into which I had originally been shown. She closed the door, and then looked at me with the archest twinkle in her eyes.

"Is it not confiding of me to trust myself with you?" said she. "You will remember that it is the Princess of Saxe-Felstein and not the poor Countess Palotta of Poland."

"Be the name what it might," I answered, "I helped a lady whom I believed to be in distress, and I have been robbed of my papers and almost of my honour as a reward."

"Colonel Gerard," said she, "we have been playing a game, you and I, and the stake was a heavy one. You have shown by delivering a message which was never given to you that you would stand at nothing in the cause of your country. My heart is German and yours is French, and I also would go all lengths, even to deceit and to theft, if at this crisis I could help my suffering fatherland. You see how frank I am."

"You tell me nothing that I have not seen."

"But now that the game is played and won, why should we bear malice? I will say this, that if ever I were in such a plight as that which I pretended in the inn of Lobenstein, I should never wish to meet a more gallant protector or a truer-hearted gentleman than Colonel Étienne Gerard. I had never thought that I could feel for a Frenchmen as I felt for you when I slipped the papers from your breast."

"But you took them, none the less."

"They were necessary to me and to Germany. I knew the arguments which they contained and the effect which they would have upon the Prince. If they had reached him all would have been lost."

"Why should your Highness descend to such expedients when a score of these brigands, who wished to hang me at your castle gate, would have done the work as well?"

"They are not brigands, but the best blood of Germany," she cried, hotly. "If you have been roughly used, you will remember the indignities to which every German has been subjected, from the Queen of Prussia downwards. As to why I did not have you waylaid upon the road, I may say that I had parties out on all sides, and that I was waiting at Lobenstein to hear of their success. When instead of their news you yourself arrived I was in despair, for there was only the one weak woman betwixt you and my husband. You see the straits to which I was driven before I used the weapon of my sex."

"I confess that you have conquered me, your Highness, and it only remains for me to leave you in possession of the field."

"But you will take your papers with you." She held them out to me as she spoke. "The Prince has crossed the Rubicon now, and nothing can bring him back. You can return these to the Emperor, and tell him that we refused to receive them. No one can accuse you then of having lost your dispatches. Good-bye, Colonel Gerard, and the best I can wish you is that when you reach France you may remain there. In a year's time there will be no place for a Frenchman upon this side of the Rhine."

And thus it was that I played the Princess of Saxe-Felstein with all Germany for a stake, and lost my game to her. I had much to think of as I walked my poor, tired Violette along the highway which leads westward from Hof. But amid all the thoughts there came back

to me always the proud, beautiful face of the German woman, and the voice of the soldier-poet as he sang from the chair. And I understood then that there was something terrible in this strong, patient Germany—this mother root of nations—and I saw that such a land, so old and so beloved, never could be conquered. And as I rode I saw that the dawn was breaking, and that the great star at which I had pointed through the palace window was dim and pale in the western sky.

7. *How the Brigadier won his Medal*

THE Duke of Tarentum, or Macdonald, as his old comrades prefer to call him, was, as I could perceive, in the vilest of tempers. His grim, Scotch face was like one of those grotesque door-knockers which one sees in the Faubourg St. Germain. We heard afterwards that the Emperor had said in jest that he would have sent him against Wellington in the South, but that he was afraid to trust him within the sound of the pipes. Major Charpentier and I could plainly see that he was smouldering with anger.

"Brigadier Gerard of the Hussars," said he, with the air of the corporal with the recruit.

I saluted.

"Major Charpentier of the Horse Grenadiers."

My companion answered to his name.

"The Emperor has a mission for you."

Without more ado he flung open the door and announced us.

I have seen Napoleon ten times on horseback to once on foot, and I think that he does wisely to show himself to the troops in this fashion, for he cuts a very good figure in the saddle. As we saw him now he was the shortest man out of six by a good hand's breadth, and yet I am no very big man myself, though I ride quite heavy enough for a hussar. It is evident, too, that his body is too long

for his legs. With his big, round head, his curved shoulders, and his clean-shaven face, he is more like a Professor at the Sorbonne than the first soldier in France. Every man to his taste, but it seems to me that, if I could clap a pair of fine light cavalry whiskers, like my own, on to him, it would do him no harm. He has a firm mouth, however, and his eyes are remarkable. I have seen them once turned on me in anger, and I had rather ride at a square on a spent horse than face them again. I am not a man who is easily daunted, either.

He was standing at the side of the room, away from the window, looking up at a great map of the country which was hung upon the wall. Berthier stood beside him, trying to look wise, and just as we entered, Napoleon snatched his sword impatiently from him and pointed with it on the map. He was talking fast and low, but I heard him say, " The valley of the Meuse," and twice he repeated " Berlin." As we entered, his aide-de-camp advanced to us, but the Emperor stopped him and beckoned us to his side.

" You have not yet received the cross of honour, Brigadier Gerard ? " he asked.

I replied that I had not, and was about to add that it was not for want of having deserved it, when he cut me short in his decided fashion.

" And you, Major ? " he asked.

" No, sire."

" Then you shall both have your opportunity now."

He led us to the great map upon the wall and placed the tip of Berthier's sword on Rheims.

" I will be frank with you, gentlemen, as with two comrades. You have both been with me since Marengo, I believe ? " He had a strangely pleasant smile, which used to light up his pale face with a kind of cold sunshine. " Here at Rheims are our present headquarters on this the 14th of March. Very good. Here is Paris, distant by road a good twenty-five leagues. Blucher lies to the

north, Schwarzenberg to the south." He prodded at the map with the sword as he spoke.

"Now," said he, "the further into the country these people march, the more completely I shall crush them. They are about to advance upon Paris. Very good. Let them do so. My brother, the King of Spain, will be there with a hundred thousand men. It is to him that I send you. You will hand him this letter, a copy of which I confide to each of you. It is to tell him that I am coming at once, in two days' time, with every man and horse and gun to his relief. I must give them forty-eight hours to recover. Then straight to Paris! You understand me, gentlemen?"

Ah, if I could tell you the glow of pride which it gave me to be taken into the great man's confidence in this way. As he handed our letters to us I clicked my spurs and threw out my chest, smiling and nodding to let him know that I saw what he would be after. He smiled also, and rested his hand for a moment upon the cape of my dolman. I would have given half my arrears of pay if my mother could have seen me at that instant.

"I will show you your route," said he, turning back to the map. "Your orders are to ride together as far as Bazoches. You will then separate, the one making for Paris by Oulchy and Neuilly, and the other to the north by Braine, Soissons and Senlis. Have you anything to say, Brigadier Gerard?"

I am a rough soldier, but I have words and ideas. I had begun to speak about glory and the peril of France when he cut me short.

"And you, Major Charpentier?"

"If we find our route unsafe, are we at liberty to choose another?" said he.

"Soldiers do not choose, they obey." He inclined his head to show that we were dismissed, and turned round to Berthier. I do not know what he said, but I heard them both laughing.

Well, as you may think, we lost little time in getting

upon our way. In half an hour we were riding down the High Street of Rheims, and it struck twelve o'clock as we passed the Cathedral. I had my little grey mare, Violette, the one which Sebastiani had wished to buy after Dresden. It is the fastest horse in the six brigades of light cavalry, and was only beaten by the Duke of Rovigo's racer from England. As to Charpentier, he had the kind of horse which a horse grenadier or a cuirassier would be likely to ride : a back like a bedstead, you understand, and legs like the posts. He is a hulking fellow himself, so that they looked a singular pair. And yet in his insane conceit he ogled the girls as they waved their handkerchiefs to me from the windows, and he twirled his ugly red moustache up into his eyes, just as if it were to him that their attention was addressed.

When we came out of the town we passed through the French camp, and then across the battle-field of yesterday, which was still covered both by our own poor fellows and by the Russians. But of the two the camp was the sadder sight. Our army was thawing away. The Guards were all right, though the young guard was full of conscripts. The artillery and the heavy cavalry were also good if there were more of them, but the infantry privates with their under-officers looked like schoolboys with theif masters. And we had no reserves. When one considered that there were 80,000 Prussians to the north and 150,000 Russians and Austrians to the south, it might make even the bravest man grave.

For my own part, I confess that I shed a tear until the thought came that the Emperor was still with us, and that on that very morning he had placed his hand upon my dolman and had promised me a medal of honour. This set me singing, and I spurred Violette on, until Charpentier had to beg me to have mercy on his great, snorting, panting camel. The road was beaten into paste and rutted two feet deep by the artillery, so that he was right in saying that it was not the place for a gallop.

I have never been very friendly with this Charpentier ;

and now for twenty miles of the way I could not draw a word from him. He rode with his brows puckered and his chin upon his breast, like a man who is heavy with thought. More than once I asked him what was on his mind, thinking that, perhaps, with my quicker intelligence I might set the matter straight. His answer always was that it was his mission of which he was thinking, which surprised me, because, although I had never thought much of his intelligence, still it seemed to me to be impossible that anyone could be puzzled by so simple and soldierly a task.

Well, we came at last to Bazoches, where he was to take the southern road and I the northern. He half turned in his saddle before he left me, and he looked at me with a singular expression of inquiry in his face.

"What do you make of it, Brigadier?" he asked.

"Of what?"

"Of our mission."

"Surely it is plain enough."

"You think so? Why should the Emperor tell us his plans?"

"Because he recognised our intelligence."

My companion laughed in a manner which I found annoying.

"May I ask what you intend to do if you find these villages full of Prussians?" he asked.

"I shall obey my orders."

"But you will be killed."

"Very possibly."

He laughed again, and so offensively that I clapped my hand to my sword. But before I could tell him what I thought of his stupidity and rudeness he had wheeled his horse, and was lumbering away down the other road. I saw his big fur cap vanish over the brow of the hill, and then I rode upon my way, wondering at his conduct. From time to time I put my hand to the breast of my tunic and felt the paper crackle beneath my fingers. Ah, my precious paper, which should be turned into the little

silver medal for which I had yearned so long. All the way from Braine to Sermoise I was thinking of what my mother would say when she saw it.

I stopped to give Violette a meal at a wayside auberge on the side of a hill not far from Soissons—a place surrounded by old oaks, and with so many crows that one could scarce hear one's own voice. It was from the innkeeper that I learned that Marmont had fallen back two days before, and that the Prussians were over the Aisne. An hour later, in the fading light, I saw two of their vedettes upon the hill to the right, and then, as darkness gathered, the heavens to the north were all glimmering from the lights of a bivouac.

When I heard that Blucher had been there for two days, I was much surprised that the Emperor should not have known that the country through which he had ordered me to carry my precious letter was already occupied by the enemy. Still, I thought of the tone of his voice when he said to Charpentier that a soldier must not choose, but must obey. I should follow the route he had laid down for me as long as Violette could move a hoof or I a finger upon her bridle. All the way from Sermoise to Soissons, where the road dips up and down, curving among fir woods, I kept my pistol ready and my sword-belt braced, pushing on swiftly where the path was straight, and then coming slowly round the corners in the way we learned in Spain.

When I came to the farmhouse which lies to the right of the road, just after you cross the wooden bridge over the Crise, near where the great statue of the Virgin stands, a woman cried to me from the field, saying that the Prussians were in Soissons. A small party of their lancers, she said, had come in that very afternoon, and a whole division was expected before midnight. I did not wait to hear the end of her tale, but clapped spurs into Violette, and in five minutes was galloping her into the town.

Three Uhlans were at the mouth of the main street,

their horses tethered, and they gossiping together, each with a pipe as long as my sabre. I saw them well in the light of an open door, but of me they could have seen only the flash of Violette's grey side and the black flutter of my cloak. A moment later I flew through a stream of them rushing from an open gateway. Violette's shoulder sent one of them reeling, and I stabbed at another but missed him. Pang, pang, went two carbines, but I had flown round the curve of the street, and never so much as heard the hiss of the balls. Ah, we were great, both Violette and I. She lay down to it like a coursed hare, the fire flying from her hoofs. I stood in my stirrups and brandished my sword. Someone sprang for my bridle. I sliced him through the arm, and I heard him howling behind me. Two horsemen closed upon me. I cut one down and outpaced the other. A minute later I was clear of the town, and flying down a broad white road with the black poplars on either side. For a time I heard the rattle of hoofs behind me, but they died and died until I could not tell them from the throbbing of my own heart. Soon I pulled up and listened, but all was silent. They had given up the chase.

Well, the first thing that I did was to dismount and to lead my mare into a small wood through which a stream ran. There I watered her and rubbed her down, giving her two pieces of sugar soaked in cognac from my flask. She was spent from the sharp chase, but it was wonderful to see how she came round with a half-hour's rest. When my thighs closed upon her again, I could tell by the spring and the swing of her that it would not be her fault if I did not win my way safe to Paris.

I must have been well within the enemy's lines now, for I heard a number of them shouting one of their rough drinking songs out of a house by the roadside, and I went round by the fields to avoid it. At another time two men came out into the moonlight (for by this time it was a cloudless night) and shouted something in German, but I galloped on without heeding them, and they were afraid

to fire, for their own hussars are dressed exactly as I was. It is best to take no notice at these times, and then they put you down as a deaf man.

It was a lovely moon, and every tree threw a black bar across the road. I could see the country-side just as if it were daytime, and very peaceful it looked, save that there was a great fire raging somewhere in the north. In the silence of the night-time, and with the knowledge that danger was in front and behind me, the sight of that great distant fire was very striking and awesome. But I am not easily clouded, for I have seen too many singular things,so I hummed a tune between my teeth, and thought of little Lisette, whom I might see in Paris. My mind was full of her when, trotting round a corner, I came straight upon half-a-dozen German dragoons, who were sitting round a brushwood fire by the roadside.

I am an excellent soldier. I do not say this because I am prejudiced in my own favour, but because I really am so. I can weigh every chance in a moment, and decide with as much certainty as though I had brooded for a week. Now I saw like a flash that, come what might, I should be chased, and on a horse which had already done a long twelve leagues. But it was better to be chased onwards than to be chased back. On this moonlit night, with fresh horses behind me, I must take my risk in either case ; but if I were to shake them off, I preferred that it should be near Senlis than near Soissons.

All this flashed on me as if by instinct, you understand. My eyes had hardly rested on the bearded faces under the brass helmets before my rowels had touched Violette, and she off with a rattle like a pas-de-charge. Oh, the shouting and rushing and stamping from behind us ! Three of them fired and three swung themselves on to their horses. A bullet rapped on the crupper of my saddle with a noise like a stick on a door. Violette sprang madly forward, and I thought she had been wounded, but it was only a graze above the near fore-fetlock. Ah, the dear little mare, how I loved her when I felt her settle

down into that long, easy gallop of hers, her hoofs going like a Spanish girl's castanets. I could not hold myself, I turned on my saddle and shouted and raved, "Vive l'Empereur!" I screamed and laughed at the gust of oaths that came back to me.

But it was not over yet. If she had been fresh she might have gained a mile in five. Now she could only hold her own with a verv little over. There was one of them, a young boy of an officer, who was better mounted than the others. He drew ahead with every stride. Two hundred yards behind him were two troopers, but I saw every time that I glanced round that the distance between them was increasing. The other three who had waited to shoot were a long way in the rear.

The officer's mount was a bay—a fine horse, though not to be spoken of with Violette; yet it was a powerful brute, and it seemed to me that in a few miles its freshness might tell. I waited until the lad was a long way in front of his comrades, and then I eased my mare down a little —a very, very little, so that he might think he was really catching me. When he came within pistol-shot of me I drew and cocked my own pistol, and laid my chin upon my shoulder to see what he would do. He did not offer to fire, and I soon discerned the cause. The silly boy had taken his pistols from his holsters when he had camped for the night. He wagged his sword at me now and roared some threat or other. He did not seem to understand that he was at my mercy. I eased Violette down until there was not the length of a long lance between the grey tail and the bay muzzle.

"Rendez-vous!" he yelled.

"I must compliment monsieur upon his French," said I, resting the barrel of my pistol upon my bridle-arm, which I have always found best when shooting from the saddle. I aimed at his face, and could see, even in the moonlight, how white he grew when he understood that it was all up with him. But even as my finger pressed the trigger I thought of his mother, and I put my

ball through his horse's shoulder. I fear he hurt himself in the fall, for it was a fearful crash, but I had my letter to think of, so I stretched the mare into a gallop once more.

But they were not so easily shaken off, these brigands. The two troopers thought no more of their young officer than if he had been a recruit thrown in the riding-school. They left him to the others and thundered on after me. I had pulled up on the brow of a hill, thinking that I had heard the last of them ; but, my faith, I soon saw there was no time for loitering, so away we went, the mare tossing her head and I my shako, to show what we thought of two dragoons who tried to catch a hussar. But at this moment, even while I laughed at the thought, my heart stood still within me, for there at the end of the long white road was a black patch of cavalry waiting to receive me. To a young soldier it might have seemed the shadow of the trees, but to me it was a troop of hussars and, turn where I could, death seemed to be waiting for me.

Well, I had the dragoons behind me and the hussars in front. Never since Moscow have I seemed to be in such peril. But for the honour of the brigade I had rather be cut down by a light cavalryman than by a heavy. I never drew bridle, therefore, or hesitated for an instant, but I let Violette have her head. I remember that I tried to pray as I rode, but I am a little out of practice at such things, and the only words I could remember were the prayer for fine weather which we used at the school on the evening before holidays. Even this seemed better than nothing, and I was pattering it out, when suddenly I heard French voices in front of me. Ah, mon Dieu, but the joy went through my heart like a musket-ball. They were ours—our own dear little rascals from the corps of Marmont. Round whisked my two dragoons and galloped for their lives, with the moon gleaming on their brass helmets, while I trotted up to my friends with no undue haste, for I would have them understand that

though a hussar may fly, it is not in his nature to fly very fast. Yet I fear that Violette's heaving flanks and foam-spattered muzzle gave the lie to my careless bearing.

Who should be at the head of the troop but old Bouvet, whom I saved at Leipzig! When he saw me his little pink eyes filled with tears, and, indeed, I could not but shed a few myself at the sight of his joy. I told him of my mission, but he laughed when I said that I must pass through Senlis.

"The enemy is there," said he. "You cannot go."

"I prefer to go where the enemy is," I answered.

"But why not go straight to Paris with your dispatch? Why should you choose to pass through the one place where you are almost sure to be taken or killed?"

"A soldier does not choose—he obeys," said I, just as I had heard Napoleon say it.

Old Bouvet laughed in his wheezy way, until I had to give my moustachios a twirl and look him up and down in a manner which brought him to reason.

"Well," said he, "you had best come along with us, for we are all bound for Senlis. Our orders are to reconnoitre the place. A squadron of Poniatowski's Polish Lancers are in front of us. If you must ride through it, it is possible that we may be able to go with you."

So away we went, jingling and clanking through the quiet night until we came up with the Poles—fine old soldiers all of them, though a trifle heavy for their horses. It was a treat to see them, for they could not have carried themselves better if they had belonged to my own brigade. We rode together, until in the early morning we saw the lights of Senlis. A peasant was coming along with a cart, and from him we learned how things were going there.

His information was certain, for his brother was the Mayor's coachman, and he had spoken with him late the night before. There was a single squadron of Cossacks —or a polk, as they call it in their frightful language— quartered upon the Mayor's house, which stands at the

corner of the market-place, and is the largest building in the town. A whole division of Prussian infantry was encamped in the woods to the north, but only the Cossacks were in Senlis. Ah, what a chance to avenge ourselves upon these barbarians, whose cruelty to our poor countryfolk was the talk at every camp fire.

We were into the town like a torrent, hacked down the vedettes, rode over the guard, and were smashing in the doors of the Mayor's house before they understood that there was a Frenchman within twenty miles of them. We saw horrid heads at the windows—heads bearded to the temples, with tangled hair and sheepskin caps, and silly, gaping mouths. "Hourra! Hourra!" they shrieked, and fired with their carbines, but our fellows were into the house and at their throats before they had wiped the sleep out of their eyes. It was dreadful to see how the Poles flung themselves upon them, like starving wolves upon a herd of fat bucks—for, as you know, the Poles have a blood feud against the Cossacks. The most were killed in the upper rooms, whither they had fled for shelter, and the blood was pouring down into the hall like rain from a roof. They are terrible soldiers, these Poles, though I think they are a trifle heavy for their horses. Man for man, they are as big as Kellermann's cuirassiers. Their equipment is, of course, much lighter, since they are without the cuirass, back-plate and helmet.

Well, it was at this point that I made an error—a very serious error it must be admitted. Up to this moment I had carried out my mission in a manner which only my modesty prevents me from describing as remarkable. But now I did that which an official would condemn and a soldier excuse.

There is no doubt that the mare was spent, but still it is true that I might have galloped on through Senlis and reached the country, where I should have had no enemy between me and Paris. But what hussar can ride past a fight and never draw rein? It is to ask too much of

him. Besides, I thought that if Violette had an hour of rest I might have three hours the better at the other end. Then on the top of it came those heads at the windows, with their sheepskin hats and their barbarous cries. I sprang from my saddle, threw Violette's bridle over a rail-post, and ran into the house with the rest. It is true that I was too late to be of service, and that I was nearly wounded by a lance-thrust from one of these dying savages. Still, it is a pity to miss even tne smallest affair, for one never knows what opportunity for advancement may present itself. I have seen more soldierly work in outpost skirmishes and little gallop-and-hack affairs of the kind than in any of the Emperor's big battles.

When the house was cleared I took a bucket of water out for Violette, and our peasant guide showed me where the good Mayor kept his fodder. My faith, but the little sweetheart was ready for it. Then I sponged down her legs, and leaving her still tethered I went back into the house to find a mouthful for myself, so that I should not need to halt again until I was in Paris.

And now I come to the part of my story which may seem singular to you, although I could tell you at least ten things every bit as queer which have happened to me in my lifetime. You can understand that, to a man who spends his life in scouting and vedette duties on the bloody ground which lies between two great armies, there are many chances of strange experiences. I'll tell you, however, exactly what occurred.

Old Bouvet was waiting in the passage when I entered, and he asked me whether we might not crack a bottle of wine together. "My faith, we must not be long," said he. "There are ten thousand of Theilmann's Prussians in the woods up yonder."

"Where is the wine?" I asked.

"Ah, you may trust two hussars to find where the wine is," said he, and taking a candle in his hand, he led the way down the stone stairs into the kitchen.

When we got there we found another door, which

opened on to a winding stair with the cellar at the bottom. The Cossacks had been there before us, as was easily seen by the broken bottles littered all over it. However, the Mayor was a *bon-vivant*, and I do not wish to have a better set of bins to pick from. Chambertin, Graves, Alicant, white wine and red, sparkling and still, they lay in pyramids peeping coyly out of sawdust. Old Bouvet stood with his candle looking here and peeping there, purring in his throat like a cat before a milk-pail. He had picked upon a Burgundy at last, and had his hand outstretched to the bottle when there came a roar of musketry from above us, a rush of feet, and such a yelping and screaming as I have never listened to. The Prussians were upon us !

Bouvet is a brave man : I will say that for him. He flashed out his sword and away he clattered up the stone steps, his spurs clinking as he ran. I followed him, but just as we came out into the kitchen passage a tremendous shout told us that the house had been recaptured.

" It is all over," I cried, grasping at Bouvet's sleeve.

" There is one more to die," he shouted, and away he went like a madman up the second stair. In effect, I should have gone to my death also had I been in his place, for he had done very wrong in not throwing out his scouts to warn him if the Germans advanced upon him. For an instant I was about to rush up with him, and then I bethought myself that, after all, I had my own mission to think of, and that if I were taken the important letter of the Emperor would be sacrificed. I let Bouvet die alone, therefore, and I went down into the cellar again, closing the door behind me.

Well, it was not a very rosy prospect down there either. Bouvet had dropped the candle when the alarm came, and I, pawing about in the darkness, could find nothing but broken bottles. At last I came upon the candle, which had rolled under the curve of a cask, but, try as I would with my tinder-box, I could not light it. The reason was that the wick had been wet in a puddle of

wine, so suspecting that this might be the case, I cut the end off with my sword. Then I found that it lighted easily enough. But what to do I could not imagine. The scoundrels upstairs were shouting themselves hoarse, several hundred of them from the sound, and it was clear that some of them would soon want to moisten their throats. There would be an end to a dashing soldier and of the mission and of the medal. I thought of my mother and I thought of the Emperor. It made me weep to think that the one would lose so excellent a son and the other the best light cavalry officer he ever had since Lasalle's time. But presently I dashed the tears from my eyes. "Courage!" I cried, striking myself upon the chest. "Courage, my brave boy! Is it possible that one who has come safely from Moscow without so much as a frost-bite will die in a French wine-cellar?" At the thought I was up on my feet and clutching at the letter in my tunic, for the crackle of it gave me courage.

My first plan was to set fire to the house in the hope of escaping in the confusion. My second to get into an empty wine-cask. I was looking round to see if I could find one, when suddenly, in the corner, I espied a little low door, painted of the same grey colour as the wall, so that it was only a man with quick sight who would have noticed it. I pushed against it, and at first I imagined that it was locked. Presently, however, it gave a little, and then I understood that it was held by the pressure of something on the other side. I put my feet against a hogshead of wine, and I gave such a push that the door flew open and I came down with a crash upon my back, the candle flying out of my hands, so that I found myself in darkness once more. I picked myself up and stared through the black archway into the gloom beyond.

There was a slight ray of light coming from some slit or grating. The dawn had broken outside, and I could dimly see the long, curving sides of several huge casks, which made me think that perhaps this was where the Mayor kept his reserves of wine while they were maturing.

At any rate, it seemed to be a safer hiding-place than the outer cellar, so gathering up my candle, I was just closing the door behind me, when I suddenly saw something which filled me with amazement, and even, I confess, with the smallest little touch of fear.

I have said that at the farther end of the cellar there was a dim grey fan of light striking downwards from somewhere near the roof. Well, as I peered through the darkness, I suddenly saw a great, tall man skip into this belt of daylight, and then out again into the darkness at the further end. My word, I gave such a start that my shako nearly broke its chin-strap! It was only a glance, but, none the less, I had time to see that the fellow had a hairy Cossack cap on his head, and that he was a great, long-legged, broad-shouldered brigand, with a sabre at his waist. My faith, even Étienne Gerard was a little staggered at being left alone with such a creature in the dark.

But only for a moment. "Courage!" I thought. "Am I not a hussar, a brigadier, too, at the age of thirty-one, and the chosen messenger of the Emperor?" After all, this skulker had more cause to be afraid of me than I of him. And then suddenly I understood that he was afraid—horribly afraid. I could read it from his quick step and his bent shoulders as he ran among the barrels, like a rat making for its hole. And, of course, it must have been he who had held the door against me, and not some packing-case or wine-cask as I had imagined. He was the pursued, then, and I the pursuer. Aha, I felt my whiskers bristle as I advanced upon him through the darkness! He would find that he had no chicken to deal with, this robber from the North. For the moment I was magnificent.

At first I had feared to light my candle lest I should make a mark of myself, but now, after cracking my shin over a box, and catching my spurs in some canvas, I thought the bolder course the wiser. I lit it, therefore, and then I advanced with long strides, my sword in my

hand. "Come out, you rascal!" I cried. "Nothing can save you. You will at last meet with your deserts."

I held my candle high, and presently I caught a glimpse of the man's head staring at me over a barrel. He had a gold chevron on his black cap, and the expression of his face told me in an instant that he was an officer and a man of refinement.

"Monsieur," he cried, in excellent French, "I surrender myself on a promise of quarter. But if I do not have your promise, I will then sell my life as dearly as I can."

"Sir," said I, "a Frenchman knows how to treat an unfortunate enemy. Your life is safe." With that he handed his sword over the top of the barrel, and I bowed with the candle on my heart. "Whom have I the honour of capturing?" I asked.

"I am the Count Boutkine, of the Emperor's own Don Cossacks," said he. "I came out with my troop to reconnoitre Senlis, and as we found no sign of your people we determind to spend the night here."

"And would it be an indiscretion," I asked, "if I were to inquire how you came into the back cellar?"

"Nothing more simple," said he. "It was our intention to start at early dawn. Feeling chilled after dressing, I thought that a cup of wine would do me no harm, so I came down to see what I could find. As I was rummaging about, the house was suddenly carried by assault so rapidly that by the time I had climbed the stairs it was all over. It only remained for me to save myself, so I came down here and hid myself in the back cellar, where you have found me."

I thought of how old Bouvet had behaved under the same conditions, and the tears sprang to my eyes as I contemplated the glory of France. Then I had to consider what I should do next. It was clear that this Russian Count, being in the back cellar while we were in the front one, had not heard the sounds which would have told him that the house was once again in the hands

of his own allies. If he should once understand this the tables would be turned, and I should be his prisoner instead of he being mine. What was I to do? I was at my wits' end, when suddenly there came to me an idea so brilliant that I could not but be amazed at my own invention.

"Count Boutkine," said I, "I find myself in a most difficult position."

"And why?" he asked.

"Because I have promised you your life."

His jaw dropped a little.

"You would not withdraw your promise?" he cried.

"If the worst comes to the worst I can die in your defence," said I; "but the difficulties are great."

"What is it, then?" he asked.

"I will be frank with you," said I. "You must know that our fellows, and especially the Poles, are so incensed against the Cossacks that the mere sight of the uniform drives them mad. They precipitate themselves instantly upon the wearer and tear him limb from limb. Even their officers cannot restrain them."

The Russian grew pale at my words and the way in which I said them.

"But this is terrible," said he.

"Horrible!" said I. "If we were to go up together at this moment I cannot promise how far I could protect you."

"I am in your hands," he cried. "What would you suggest that we should do? Would it not be best that I should remain here?"

"That worst of all."

"And why?"

"Because our fellows will ransack the house presently, and then you would be cut to pieces. No, no, I must go and break it to them. But even then, when once they see that accursed uniform, I do not know what may happen."

"Should I, then, take the uniform off?"

"Excellent!" I cried. "Hold, we have it! You will take your uniform off and put on mine. That will make you sacred to every French soldier."

"It is not the French I fear so much as the Poles."

"But my uniform will be a safeguard against either."

"How can I thank you?" he cried. "But you—what are you to wear?"

"I will wear yours."

"And perhaps fall a victim to your generosity?"

"It is my duty to take the risk," I answered; "but I have no fears. I will ascend in your uniform. A hundred swords will be turned upon me. 'Hold!' I will shout, 'I am the Brigadier Gerard!' Then they will see my face. They will know me. And I will tell them about you. Under the shield of these clothes you will be sacred."

His fingers trembled with eagerness as he tore off his tunic. His boots and breeches were much like my own, so there was no need to change them, but I gave him my hussar jacket, my dolman, my shako, my sword-belt and my sabre-tasche, while I took in exchange his high sheep-skin cap with the gold chevron, his fur-trimmed coat and his crooked sword. Be it well understood that in changing the tunics I did not forget to change my thrice-precious letter also from my old one to my new.

"With your leave," said I, "I shall now bind you to a barrel."

He made a great fuss over this, but I have learned in my soldiering never to throw away chances, and how could I tell that he might not, when my back was turned, see how the matter really stood, and break in upon my plans? He was leaning against a barrel at the time, so I ran six times round it with a rope, and then tied it with a big knot behind. If he wished to come upstairs he would, at least, have to carry a thousand litres of good French wine for a knapsack. I then shut the door of the back cellar behind me, so that he might not hear what was

going forward, and tossing the candle away I ascended the kitchen stair.

There were only about twenty steps, and yet, while I came up them, I seemed to have time to think of everything that I had ever hoped to do. It was the same feeling that I had at Eylau when I lay with my broken leg and saw the horse artillery galloping down upon me. Of course, I knew that if I were taken I should be shot instantly as being disguised within the enemy's lines. Still, it was a glorious death—in the direct service of the Emperor—and I reflected that there could not be less than five lines, and perhaps seven, in the *Moniteur* about me. Palaret had eight lines, and I am sure that he had not so fine a career.

When I made my way out into the hall, with all the nonchalance in my face and manner that I could assume, the very first thing that I saw was Bouvet's dead body, with his legs drawn up and a broken sword in his hand. I could see by the black smudge that he had been shot at close quarters. I should have wished to salute as I went by, for he was a gallant man, but I feared lest I should be seen, and so I passed on.

The front of the hall was full of Prussian infantry, who were knocking loopholes in the wall, as though they expected that there might be yet another attack. Their officer, a little man, was running about giving directions. They were all too busy to take much notice of me, but another officer, who was standing by the door with a long pipe in his mouth, strode across and clapped me on the shoulder, pointing to the dead bodies of our poor hussars, and saying something which was meant for a jest, for his long beard opened and showed every fang in his head. I laughed heartily also, and said the only Russian words that I knew. I learned them from little Sophie, at Wilna, and they meant: "If the night is fine we shall meet under the oak tree, but if it rains we shall meet in the byre." It was all the same to this German, however, and I have no doubt that he gave me credit for saying something

very witty indeed, for he roared laughing, and slapped me on my shoulder again. I nodded to him and marched out of the hall-door as coolly as if I were the commandant of the garrison.

There were a hundred horses tethered about outside, most of them belonging to the Poles and hussars. Good little Violette was waiting with the others, and she whinnied when she saw me coming towards her. But I would not mount her. No. I was much too cunning for that. On the contrary, I chose the most shaggy little Cossack horse that I could see, and I sprang upon it with as much assurance as though it had belonged to my father before me. It had a great bag of plunder slung over its neck, and this I laid upon Violette's back, and led her along beside me. Never have you seen such a picture of the Cossack returning from the foray. It was superb.

Well, the town was full of Prussians by this time. They lined the side-walks and pointed me out to each other, saying, as I could judge from their gestures, "There goes one of those devils of Cossacks. They are the boys for foraging and plunder."

One or two officers spoke to me with an air of authority, but I shook my head and smiled, and said, "If the night is fine we shall meet under the oak tree, but if it rains we shall meet in the byre," at which they shrugged their shoulders and gave the matter up. In this way I worked along until I was beyond the northern outskirt of the town. I could see in the roadway two lancer vedettes with their black and white pennons, and I knew that when I was once past these I should be a free man once more. I made my pony trot, therefore, Violette rubbing her nose against my knee all the time, and looking up at me to ask how she had deserved that this hairy doormat of a creature should be preferred to her. I was not more than a hundred yards from the Uhlans when, suddenly, you can imagine my feelings when I saw a real Cossack coming galloping along the road towards me.

Ah, my friend, you who read this, if you have any heart, you will feel for a man like me, who had gone through so many dangers and trials, only at this very last moment to be confronted with one which appeared to put an end to everything. I will confess that for a moment I lost heart, and was inclined to throw myself down in my despair, and to cry out that I had been betrayed. But, no ; I was not beaten even now. I opened two buttons of my tunic so that I might get easily at the Emperor's message, for it was my fixed determination when all hope was gone to swallow the letter and then die sword in hand. Then I felt that my little, crooked sword was loose in its sheath, and I trotted on to where the vedettes were waiting. They seemed inclined to stop me, but I pointed to the other Cossack, who was still a couple of hundred yards off, and they, understanding that I merely wished to meet him, let me pass with a salute.

I dug my spurs into my pony then, for if I were only far enough from the lancers I thought I might manage the Cossack without much difficulty. He was an officer, a large, bearded man, with a gold chevron in his cap, just the same as mine. As I advanced he unconsciously aided me by pulling up his horse, so that I had a fine start of the vedettes. On I came for him, and I could see wonder changing to suspicion in his brown eyes as he looked at me and at my pony, and at my equipment. I do not know what it was that was wrong, but he saw something which was as it should not be. He shouted out a question, and then when I gave no answer he pulled out his sword. I was glad in my heart to see him do so, for I had always rather fight than cut down an unsuspecting enemy. Now I made at him full tilt, and, parrying his cut, I got my point in just under the fourth button of his tunic. Down he went, and the weight of him nearly took me off my horse before I could disengage. I never glanced at him to see if he were living or dead, for I sprang off my pony and on to Violette, with a shake of my

bridle and a kiss of my hand to the two Uhlans behind me. They galloped after me, shouting, but Violette had had her rest, and was just as fresh as when she started. I took the first side road to the west and then the first to the south, which would take me away from the enemy's country. On we went and on, every stride taking me farther from my foes and nearer to my friends. At last, when I reached the end of a long stretch of road, and looking back from it could see no sign of any pursuers, I understood that my troubles were over.

And it gave me a glow of happiness, as I rode, to think that I had done to the letter what the Emperor had ordered. What would he say when he saw me? What could he say which would do justice to the incredible way in which I had risen above every danger? He had ordered me to go through Sermoise, Soissons and Senlis, little dreaming that they were all three occupied by the enemy. And yet I had done it. I had borne his letter in safety through each of these towns. Hussars, dragoons, lancers, Cossacks and infantry—I had run the gauntlet of all of them, and had come out unharmed.

When I had got as far as Dammartin I caught a first glimpse of our own outposts. There was a troop of dragoons in a field, and of course I could see from the horsehair crests that they were French, I galloped towards them in order to ask them if all was safe between there and Paris, and as I rode I felt such a pride at having won my way back to my friends again, that I could not refrain from waving my sword in the air.

At this a young officer galloped out from among the dragoons, also brandishing his sword, and it warmed my heart to think that he should come riding with such ardour and enthusiasm to greet me. I made Violette caracole, and as we came together I brandished my sword more gallantly than ever, but you can imagine my feelings when he suddenly made a cut at me which would certainly have taken my head off if I had not fallen forward with my nose in Violette's mane. My faith, it

whistled just over my cap like an east wind. Of course, it came from this accursed Cossack uniform which, in my excitement, I had forgotten all about, and this young dragoon had imagined that I was some Russian champion who was challenging the French cavalry. My word, he was a frightened man when he understood how near he had been to killing the celebrated Brigadier Gerard.

Well, the road was clear, and about three o'clock in the afternoon I was at St. Denis, though it took me a long two hours to get from there to Paris, for the road was blocked with commissariat waggons and guns of the artillery reserve, which was going north to Marmont and Mortier. You cannot conceive the excitement which my appearance in such a costume made in Paris, and when I came to the Rue de Rivoli I should think I had a quarter of a mile of folk riding or running behind me. Word had got about from the dragoons (two of whom had come with me), and everybody knew about my adventures and how I had come by my uniform. It was a triumph—men shouting and women waving their handkerchiefs and blowing kisses from the windows.

Although I am a man singularly free from conceit, still I must confess that, on this one occasion, I could not restrain myself from showing that this reception gratified me. The Russian's coat had hung very loose upon me, but now I threw out my chest until it was as tight as a sausage-skin. And my little sweetheart of a mare tossed her mane and pawed with her front hoofs, frisking her tail about as though she said, "We've done it together this time. It is to us that commissions should be entrusted." When I kissed her between the nostrils as I dismounted at the gate of the Tuileries, there was as much shouting as if a bulletin had been read from the Grand Army.

I was hardly in costume to visit a King; but, after all, if one has a soldierly figure one can do without all that. I was shown up straight away to Joseph, whom I had often seen in Spain. He seemed as stout, as quiet

and as amiable as ever. Talleyrand was in the room with him, or I suppose I should call him the Duke of Benevento, but I confess that I like old names best. He read my letter when Joseph Buonaparte handed it to him, and then he looked at me with the strangest expression in those funny little, twinkling eyes of his.

"Were you the only messenger?" he asked.

"There was one other, sir," said I. "Major Charpentier, of the Horse Grenadiers.'

"He has not yet arrived," said the King of Spain.

"If you had seen the legs of his horse, sire, you would not wonder at it," I remarked.

"There may be other reasons," said Talleyrand, and he gave that singular smile of his.

Well, they paid me a compliment or two, though they might have said a good deal more and yet have said too little. I bowed myself out, and very glad I was to get away, for I hate a Court as much as I love a camp. Away I went to my old friend Chaubert, in the Rue Miromesnil, and there I got his hussar uniform, which fitted me very well. He and Lisette and I supped together in his rooms, and all my dangers were forgotten. In the morning I found Violette ready for another twenty-league stretch. It was my intention to return instantly to the Emperor's headquarters, for I was, as you may well imagine, impatient to hear his words of praise, and to receive my reward.

I need not say that I rode back by a safe route, for I had seen quite enough of Uhlans and Cossacks. I passed through Meaux and Château Thierry, and so in the evening I arrived at Rheims, where Napoleon was still lying. The bodies of our fellows and of St. Prest's Russians had all been buried, and I could see changes in the camp also. The soldiers looked better cared for; some of the cavalry had received remounts, and everything was in excellent order. It was wonderful what a good general can effect in a couple of days.

When I came to the headquarters I was shown

straight into the Emperor's room. He was drinking coffee at a writing-table, with a big plan drawn out on paper in front of him. Berthier and Macdonald were leaning one over each shoulder, and he was talking so quickly that I don't believe that either of them could catch a half of what he was saying. But when his eyes fell upon me he dropped the pen on to the chart, and he sprang up with a look in his pale face which struck me cold.

"What the deuce are you doing here?" he shouted. When he was angry he had a voice like a peacock.

"I have the honour to report to you, sire," said I, "that I have delivered your dispatch safely to the King of Spain."

"What!" he yelled, and his two eyes transfixed me like bayonets. Oh, those dreadful eyes, shifting from grey to blue, like steel in the sunshine. I can see them now when I have a bad dream.

"What has become of Charpentier?" he asked.

"He is captured," said Macdonald.

"By whom?"

"The Russians."

"The Cossacks?"

"No, a single Cossack."

"He gave himself up?"

"Without resistance."

"He is an intelligent officer. You will see that the medal of honour is awarded to him."

When I heard those words I had to rub my eyes to make sure that I was awake.

"As to you," cried the Emperor, taking a step forward as if he would have struck me, "you brain of a hare, what do you think that you were sent upon this mission for? Do you conceive that I would send a really important message by such a hand as yours, and through every village which the enemy holds? How you came through them passes my comprehension; but if your fellow-messenger had had but as little sense as you, my whole

plan of campaign would have been ruined. Can you not see, coglione, that this message contained false news, and that it was intended to deceive the enemy whilst I put a very different scheme into execution ? "

When I heard those cruel words and saw the angry, white face which glared at me, I had to hold the back of a chair, for my mind was failing me and my knees would hardly bear me up. But then I took courage as I reflected that I was an honourable gentleman, and that my whole life had been spent in toiling for this man and for my beloved country.

" Sire," said I, and the tears would trickle down my cheeks whilst I spoke, " when you are dealing with a man like me you would find it wiser to deal openly. Had I known that you had wished the dispatch to fall into the hands of the enemy, I would have seen that it came there. As I believed that I was to guard it, I was prepared to sacrifice my life for it. I do not believe, sire, that any man in the world ever met with more toils and perils than I have done in trying to carry out what I thought was your will."

I dashed the tears from my eyes as I spoke, and with such fire and spirit as I could command I gave him an account of it all, of my dash through Soissons, my brush with the dragoons, my adventure in Senlis, my rencontre with Count Boutkine in the cellar, my disguise, my meeting with the Cossack officer, my flight, and how at the last moment I was nearly cut down by a French dragoon. The Emperor, Berthier and Macdonald listened with astonishment on their faces. When I had finished Napoleon stepped forward and he pinched me by the ear.

" There, there ! " said he. " Forget anything which I may have said. I would have done better to trust you. You may go."

I turned to the door, and my hand was upon the handle, when the Emperor called upon me to stop.

" You will see," said he, turning to the Duke of

Tarentum, " that Brigadier Gerard has the special medal of honour, for I believe that if he has the thickest head he has also the stoutest heart in my army."

8. *How the Brigadier was tempted by the Devil*

THE spring is at hand, my friends. I can see the little green spear-heads breaking out once more upon the chestnut trees, and the café tables have all been moved into the sunshine. It is more pleasant to sit there, and yet I do not wish to tell my little stories to the whole town. You have heard my doings as a lieutenant, as a squadron officer, as a colonel, as the chief of a brigade. But now I suddenly become something higher and more important. I become history.

If you have read of those closing years of the life of the Emperor which were spent in the Island of St. Helena, you will remember that, again and again, he implored permission to send out one single letter which should be unopened by those who held him. Many times he made this request, and even went so far as to promise that he would provide for his own wants and cease to be an expense to the British Government if it were granted to him. But his guardians knew that he was a terrible man, this pale, fat gentleman in the straw hat, and they dared not grant him what he asked. Many have wondered who it was to whom he could have had anything so secret to say. Some have supposed that it was to his wife, and some that it was to his father-in-law ; some that it was to the Emperor Alexander, and some to Marshal Soult. What will you think of me, my friends, when I tell you it was to me—to me, the Brigadier Gerard—that the Emperor wished to write ? Yes, humble as you see me, with only my 100 francs a month of half-pay between me and hunger, it is none the less true that I was always in the Emperor's mind, and that he would have given his

left hand for five minutes' talk with me. I will tell you to-night how this came about.

It was after the Battle of Fére-Champenoise, where the conscripts in their blouses and their sabots made such a fine stand, that we, the more long-headed of us, began to understand that it was all over with us. Our reserve ammunition had been taken in the battle, and we were left with silent guns and empty caissons. Our cavalry, too, was in a deplorable condition, and my own brigade had been destroyed in the charge at Craonne. Then came the news that the enemy had taken Paris, that the citizens had mounted the white cockade; and finally, most terrible of all, that Marmont and his corps had gone over to the Bourbons. We looked at each other, and asked how many more of our generals were going to turn against us. Already there were Jourdan, Marmont, Murat, Bernadotte and Jomini—though nobody minded much about Jomini, for his pen was always sharper than his sword. We had been ready to fight Europe, but it looked now as though we were to fight Europe and half France as well.

We had come to Fontainebleau by a long, forced march, and there we were assembled, the poor remnants of us, the corps of Ney, the corps of my cousin Gerard, and the corps of Macdonald: twenty-five thousand in all, with seven thousand of the guard. But we had our prestige, which was worth fifty thousand, and our Emperor, who was worth fifty thousand more. He was always among us, serene, smiling, confident, taking his snuff and playing with his little riding-whip. Never in the days of his greatest victories have I admired him as much as I did during the Campaign of France.

One evening I was with a few of my officers, drinking a glass of wine of Suresnes. I mention that it was wine of Suresnes just to show you that times were not very good with us. Suddenly I was disturbed by a message from Berthier that he wished to see me. When I speak of my old comrades-in-arms, I will, with your permission,

leave out all the fine foreign titles which they had picked up during the wars. They are excellent for a Court, but you never heard them in the camp, for we could not afford to do away with our Ney, our Rapp, or our Soult—names which were as stirring to our ears as the blare of our trumpets blowing the reveille. It was Berthier, then, who sent to say that he wished to see me.

He had a suite of rooms at the end of the gallery of Francis the First, not very far from those of the Emperor. In the ante-chamber were waiting two men whom I knew well: Colonel Despienne, of the 57th of the line, and Captain Tremeau, of the Voltigeurs. They were both old soldiers—Tremeau had carried a musket in Egypt—and they were also both famous in the army for their courage and their skill with weapons. Tremeau had become a little stiff in the wrist, but Despienne was capable at his best of making me exert myself. He was a tiny fellow, about three inches short of the proper height for a man—he was exactly three inches shorter than myself—but both with the sabre and with the small-sword he had several times almost held his own against me when we used to exhibit at Verron's Hall of Arms in the Palais Royal. You may think that it made us sniff something in the wind when we found three such men called together into one room. You cannot see the lettuce and dressing without suspecting a salad.

"Name of a pipe!" said Tremeau, in his barrack-room fashion. "Are we then expecting three champions of the Bourbons?"

To all of us the idea appeared not improbable. Certainly in the whole army we were the very three who might have been chosen to meet them.

"The Prince of Neufchâtel desires to speak with the Brigadier Gerard," said a footman, appearing at the door.

In I went, leaving my two companions consumed with impatience behind me. It was a small room, but very gorgeously furnished. Berthier was seated opposite to me at a little table, with a pen in his hand and a note-book

open before him. He was looking weary and slovenly—very different from that Berthier who used to give the fashion to the army, and who had so often set us poorer officers tearing our hair by trimming his pelisse with fur one campaign, and with grey astrakhan the next. On his clean-shaven, comely face there was an expression of trouble, and he looked at me as I entered his chamber in a way which had in it something furtive and displeasing.

"Chief of Brigade Gerard!" said he.

"At your service, your Highness!" I answered.

"I must ask you, before I go farther, to promise me, upon your honour as a gentleman and a soldier, that what is about to pass between us shall never be mentioned to any third person."

My word, this was a fine beginning! I had no choice but to give the promise required.

"You must know, then, that it is all over with the Emperor," said he, looking down at the table and speaking very slowly, as if he had a hard task in getting out the words. "Jourdan at Rouen and Marmont at Paris have both mounted the white cockade, and it is rumoured that Talleyrand has talked Ney into doing the same. It is evident that further resistance is useless, and that it can only bring misery upon our country. I wish to ask you, therefore, whether you are prepared to join me in laying hands upon the Emperor's person, and bringing the war to a conclusion by delivering him over to the allies?"

I assure you that when I heard this infamous proposition put forward by the man who had been the earliest friend of the Emperor, and who had received greater favours from him than any of his followers, I could only stand and stare at him in amazement. For his part he tapped his pen-handle against his teeth, and looked at me with a slanting head.

"Well?" he asked.

"I am a little deaf on one side," said I, coldly. "There

are some things which I cannot hear. I beg that you will permit me to return to my duties."

"Nay, but you must not be headstrong," rising up and laying his hand upon my shoulder. "You are aware that the Senate has declared against Napoleon, and that the Emperor Alexander refuses to treat with him."

"Sir," I cried, with passion, "I would have you know that I do not care the dregs of a wine-glass for the Senate or for the Emperor Alexander either."

"Then for what do you care?"

"For my own honour and for the service of my glorious master, the Emperor Napoleon."

"That is all very well," said Berthier, peevishly, shrugging his shoulders. "Facts are facts, and as men of the world, we must look them in the face. Are we to stand against the will of the nation? Are we to have civil war on the top of all our misfortunes? And, besides, we are thinning away. Every hour comes the news of fresh desertions. We have still time to make our peace, and, indeed, to earn the highest reward, by giving up the Emperor."

I shook so with passion that my sabre clattered against my thigh.

"Sir," I cried, "I never thought to have seen the day when a Marshal of France would have so far degraded himself as to put forward such a proposal. I leave you to your own conscience; but as for me, until I have the Emperor's own order, there shall always be the sword of Étienne Gerard between his enemies and himself."

I was so moved by my own words and by the fine position which I had taken up, that my voice broke, and I could hardly refrain from tears. I should have liked the whole army to have seen me as I stood with my head so proudly erect and my hand upon my heart proclaiming my devotion to the Emperor in his adversity. It was one of the supreme moments of my life.

"Very good," said Berthier, ringing a bell for the

lackey. "You will show the Chief of Brigade Gerard into the salon."

The footman led me into an inner room, where he desired me to be seated. For my own part, my only desire was to get away, and I could not understand why they should wish to detain me. When one has had no change of uniform during a whole winter's campaign, one does not feel at home in a palace.

I had been there about a quarter of an hour when the footman opened the door again, and in came Colonel Despienne. Good heavens, what a sight he was! His face was as white as a guardsman's gaiters, his eyes projecting, the veins swollen upon his forehead, and every hair of his moustache bristling like those of an angry cat. He was too angry to speak, and could only shake his hands at the ceiling and make a gurgling in his throat. "Parricide! Viper!" those were the words that I could catch as he stamped up and down the room.

Of course it was evident to me that he had been subjected to the same infamous proposals as I had, and that he had received them in the same spirit. His lips were sealed to me, as mine were to him, by the promise which we had taken, but I contented myself with muttering "Atrocious! Unspeakable!"—so that he might know that I was in agreement with him.

Well, we were still there, he striding furiously up and down, and I seated in the corner, when suddenly a most extraordinary uproar broke out in the room which we had just quitted. There was a snarling, worrying growl, like that of a fierce dog which has got his grip. Then came a crash and a voice calling for help. In we rushed, the two of us, and, my faith, we were none too soon.

Old Tremeau and Berthier were rolling together upon the floor, with the table upon the top of them. The Captain had one of his great, skinny yellow hands upon the Marshal's throat, and already his face was lead-coloured, and his eyes were starting from their sockets. As to Tremeau, he was beside himself, with foam upon

the corners of his lips, and such a frantic expression upon him that I am convinced, had we not loosened his iron grip, finger by finger, that it would never have relaxed while the Marshal lived. His nails were white with the power of his grasp.

"I have been tempted by the devil!" he cried, as he staggered to his feet. "Yes, I have been tempted by the devil!"

As to Berthier, he could only lean against the wall, and pant for a couple of minutes, putting his hands up to his throat and rolling his head about. Then, with an angry gesture, he turned to the heavy blue curtain which hung behind his chair.

The curtain was torn to one side and the Emperor stepped out into the room. We sprang to the salute, we three old soldiers, but it was all like a scene in a dream to us, and our eyes were as far out as Berthier's had been. Napoleon was dressed in his green-coated chasseur uniform, and he held his little, silver-headed switch in his hand. He looked at us each in turn, with a smile upon his face—that frightful smile in which neither eyes nor brow joined—and each in turn had, I believe, a pringling on his skin, for that was the effect which the Emperor's gaze had upon most of us. Then he walked across to Berthier and put his hand upon his shoulder.

"You must not quarrel with blows, my dear Prince," said he; "they are your title to nobility." He spoke in that soft, caressing manner which he could assume. There was no one who could make the French tongue sound so pretty as the Emperor, and no one who could make it more harsh and terrible.

"I believe he would have killed me," cried Berthier, still rolling his head about.

"Tut, tut! I should have come to your help had these officers not heard your cries. But I trust that you are not really hurt!" He spoke with earnestness, for he was in truth very fond of Berthier—more so than of any man, unless it were of poor Duroc.

Berthier laughed, though not with a very good grace.

"It is new for me to receive my injuries from French hands," said he.

"And yet it was in the cause of France," returned the Emperor. Then, turning to us, he took old Tremeau by the ear. "Ah, old grumbler," said he, "you were one of my Egyptian grenadiers, were you not, and had your musket of honour at Marengo. I remember you very well, my good friend. So the old fires are not yet extinguished! They still burn up when you think that your Emperor is wronged. And you, Colonel Despienne, you would not even listen to the tempter. And you, Gerard, your faithful sword is ever to be between me and my enemies. Well, well, I have had some traitors about me, but now at last we are beginning to see who are the true men."

You can fancy, my friends, the thrill of joy which it gave us when the greatest man in the whole world spoke to us in this fashion. Tremeau shook until I thought he would have fallen, and the tears ran down his gigantic moustache. If you had not seen it, you could never believe the influence which the Emperor had upon those coarse-grained, savage old veterans.

"Well, my faithful friends," said he, "if you will follow me into this room, I will explain to you the meaning of this little farce which we have been acting. I beg, Berthier, that you will remain in this chamber, and so make sure that no one interrupts us."

It was new for us to be doing business with a Marshal of France as sentry at the door. However, we followed the Emperor as we were ordered, and he led us into the recess of the window, gathering us around him and sinking his voice as he addressed us.

"I have picked you out of the whole army," said he, "as being not only the most formidable but also the most faithful of my soldiers. I was convinced that you were all three men who would never waver in your fidelity to me. If I have ventured to put that fidelity to the proof,

and to watch you while attempts were at my orders made upon your honour, it was only because, in the days when I have found the blackest treason amongst my own flesh and blood, it is necessary that I should be doubly circumspect. Suffice it that I am well convinced now that I can rely upon your valour."

"To the death, sire!" cried Tremeau, and we both repeated it after him.

Napoleon drew us all yet a little closer to him, and sank his voice still lower.

"What I say to you now I have said to no one—not to my wife or my brothers; only to you. It is all up with us, my friends. We have come to our last rally. The game is finished, and we must make provision accordingly."

My heart seemed to have changed to a nine-pounder ball as I listened to him. We had hoped against hope, but now when he, the man who was always serene and who always had reserves—when he, in that quiet, impassive voice of his, said that everything was over, we realised that the clouds had shut for ever, and the last gleam gone. Tremeau snarled and gripped at his sabre, Despienne ground his teeth, and for my own part I threw out my chest and clicked my heels to show the Emperor that there were some spirits which could rise to adversity.

"My papers and my fortune must be secured," whispered the Emperor. "The whole course of the future may depend upon my having them safe. They are our base for the next attempt—for I am very sure that these poor Bourbons would find that my footstool is too large to make a throne for them. Where am I to keep these precious things? My belongings will be searched—so will the houses of my supporters. They must be secured and concealed by men whom I can trust with that which is more precious to me than my life. Out of the whole of France, you are those whom I have chosen for this sacred trust.

"In the first place, I will tell you what these papers

are. You shall not say that I have made you blind agents in the matter. They are the official proof of my divorce from Josephine, of my legal marriage to Marie Louise, and of the birth of my son and heir, the King of Rome. If we cannot prove each of these, the future claim of my family to the throne of France falls to the ground. Then there are securities to the value of forty millions of francs —an immense sum, my friends, but of no more value than this riding-switch when compared to the other papers of which I have spoken. I tell you these things that you may realise the enormous importance of the task which I am committing to your care. Listen, now, while I inform you where you are to get these papers, and what you are to do with them.

"They were handed over to my trusty friend, the Countess Walewski, at Paris, this morning. At five o'clock she starts for Fontainebleau in her blue berline. She should reach here between half-past nine and ten. The papers will be concealed in the berline, in a hiding-place which none know but herself. She has been warned that her carriage will be stopped outside the town by three mounted officers, and she will hand the packet over to your care. You are the younger man, Gerard, but you are of the senior grade. I confide to your care this amethyst ring, which you will show the lady as a token of your mission, and which you will leave with her as a receipt for her papers.

"Having received the packet, you will ride with it into the forest as far as the ruined dove-house—the Colombier. It is possible that I may meet you there—but if it seems to me to be dangerous, I will send my body-servant, Mustapha, whose directions you may take as being mine. There is no roof to the Colombier, and to-night will be a full moon. At the right of the entrance you will find three spades leaning against the wall. With these you will dig a hole three feet deep in the north-eastern corner —that is, in the corner to the left of the door, and nearest Fontainebleau. Having buried the papers, you will

replace the soil with great care, and you will then report to me at the palace."

These were the Emperor's directions, but given with an accuracy and minuteness of detail such as no one but himself could put into an order. When he had finished, he made us swear to keep his secret as long as he lived, and as long as the papers should remain buried. Again and again he made us swear it before he dismissed us from his presence.

Colonel Despienne had quarters at the "Sign of the Pheasant," and it was there that we supped together. We were all three men who had been trained to take the strangest turns of fortune as part of our daily life and business, yet we were all flushed and moved by the extraordinary interview which we had had, and by the thought of the great adventure which lay before us. For my own part, it had been my fate three several times to take my orders from the lips of the Emperor himself, but neither the incident of the Ajaccio murderers nor the famous ride which I made to Paris appeared to offer such opportunities as this new and most intimate commission.

"If things go right with the Emperor," said Despienne, "we shall all live to be marshals yet."

We drank with him to our future cocked hats and our bâtons.

It was agreed between us that we should make our way separately to our rendezvous, which was to be the first milestone upon the Paris road. In this way we should avoid the gossip which might get about if three men who were so well known were to be seen riding out together. My little Violette had cast a shoe that morning, and the farrier was at work upon her when I returned, so that my comrades were already there when I arrived at the trysting-place. I had taken with me not only my sabre, but also my new pair of English rifled pistols, with a mallet for knocking in the charges. They had cost me a hundred and fifty francs at Trouvel's, in the Rue de Rivoli, but they would carry far further and straighter

than the others. It was with one of them that I had saved old Bouvet's life at Leipzig.

The night was cloudless, and there was a brilliant moon behind us, so that we always had three black horsemen riding down the white road in front of us. The country is so thickly wooded, however, that we could not see very far. The great palace clock had already struck ten, but there was no sign of the Countess. We began to fear that something might have prevented her from starting.

And then suddenly we heard her in the distance. Very faint at first were the birr of wheels and the tat-tat-tat of the horses' feet. Then they grew louder and clearer and louder yet, until a pair of yellow lanterns swung round the curve, and in their light we saw the two big brown horses tearing along with the high, blue carriage at the back of them. The postilion pulled them up panting and foaming within a few yards of us. In a moment we were at the window and had raised our hands in a salute to the beautiful pale face which looked out at us.

"We are the three officers of the Emperor, madame," said I, in a low voice, leaning my face down to the open window. "You have already been warned that we should wait upon you."

The Countess had a very beautiful, cream-tinted complexion of a sort which I particularly admire, but she grew whiter and whiter as she looked up at me. Harsh lines deepened upon her face until she seemed, even as I looked at her, to turn from youth into age.

"It is evident to me," she said, "that you are three impostors."

If she had struck me across the face with her delicate hand she could not have startled me more. It was not her words only, but the bitterness with which she hissed them out.

"Indeed, madame," said I. "You do us less than justice. These are the Colonel Despienne and Captain

Tremeau. For myself, my name is Brigadier Gerard, and I have only to mention it to assure anyone who has heard of me that——"

"Oh, you villains!" she interrupted. "You think that because I am only a woman I am very easily to be hoodwinked! You miserable impostors!"

I looked at Despienne, who had turned white with anger, and at Tremeau, who was tugging at his moustache.

"Madame," said I, coldly, "when the Emperor did us the honour to entrust us with this mission, he gave me this amethyst ring as a token. I had not thought that three honourable gentlemen would have needed such corroboration, but I can only confute your unworthy suspicions by placing it in your hands."

She held it up in the light of the carriage lamp, and the most dreadful expression of grief and of horror contorted her face.

"It is his!" she screamed, and then, "Oh, my God, what have I done? What have I done?"

I felt that something terrible had befallen. "Quick, madame, quick!" I cried. "Give us the papers!"

"I have already given them."

"Given them! To whom?"

"To three officers."

"When?"

"Within the half-hour."

"Where are they?"

"God help me, I do not know. They stopped the berline, and I handed them over to them without hesitation, thinking that they had come from the Emperor."

It was a thunder-clap. But those are the moments when I am at my finest.

"You remain here," said I, to my comrades. "If three horsemen pass you, stop them at any hazard. The lady will describe them to you. I will be with you presently." One shake of the bridle, and I was flying into Fontainebleau as only Violette could have carried me. At the palace I flung myself off, rushed up the stairs,

brushed aside the lackeys who would have stopped me, and pushed my way into the Emperor's own cabinet. He and Macdonald were busy with pencil and compasses over a chart. He looked up with an angry frown at my sudden entry, but his face changed colour when he saw that it was I.

"You can leave us, Marshal," said he, and then, the instant the door was closed: "What news about the papers?"

"They are gone!" said I, and in a few curt words I told him what had happened. His face was calm, but I saw the compasses quiver in his hand.

"You must recover them, Gerard!" he cried. "The destinies of my dynasty are at stake. Not a moment is to be lost! To horse, sir, to horse!"

"Who are they, sire?"

"I cannot tell. I am surrounded with treason. But they will take them to Paris. To whom should they carry them but to the villain Talleyrand? Yes, yes, they are on the Paris road, and may yet be overtaken. With the three best mounts in my stables and——"

I did not wait to hear the end of the sentence. I was already clattering down the stair. I am sure that five minutes had not passed before I was galloping Violette out of the town with the bridle of one of the Emperor's own Arab chargers in either hand. They wished me to take three, but I should have never dared to look my Violette in the face again. I feel that the spectacle must have been superb when I dashed up to my comrades and pulled the horses on to their haunches in the moonlight.

"No one has passed?"

"No one."

"Then they are on the Paris road. Quick! Up and after them!"

They did not take long, those good soldiers. In a flash they were upon the Emperor's horses, and their own left masterless by the roadside. Then away we went

upon our long chase, I in the centre, Despienne upon my right, and Tremeau a little behind, for he was the heavier man. Heavens, how we galloped! The twelve flying hoofs roared and roared along the hard, smooth road. Poplars and moon, black bars and silver streaks, for mile after mile our course lay along the same chequered track, with our shadows in front and our dust behind. We could hear the rasping of bolts and the creaking of shutters from the cottages as we thundered past them, but we were only three dark blurs upon the road by the time that the folk could look after us. It was just striking midnight as we raced into Corbail; but an ostler with a bucket in either hand was throwing his black shadow across the golden fan which was cast from the open door of the inn.

"Three riders!" I gasped. "Have they passed?"

"I have just been watering their horses," said he. "I should think they——"

"On, on, my friends!" and away we flew, striking fire from the cobblestones of the little town. A gendarme tried to stop us, but his voice was drowned by our rattle and clatter. The houses slid past, and we were out on the country road again, with a clear twenty miles between ourselves and Paris. How could they escape us, with the finest horses in France behind them? Not one of the three had turned a hair, but Violette was always a head and shoulders to the front. She was going within herself too, and I knew by the spring of her that I had only to let her stretch herself, and the Emperor's horses would see the colour of her tail.

"There they are!" cried Despienne.

"We have them!" growled Tremeau.

"On, comrades, on!" I shouted, once more.

A long stretch of white road lay before us in the moonlight. Far away down it we could see three cavaliers, lying low upon their horses' necks. Every instant they grew larger and clearer as we gained upon them. I could see quite plainly that the two upon either side were

wrapped in mantles and rode upon chestnut horses, whilst the man between them was dressed in a chasseur uniform and mounted upon a grey. They were keeping abreast, but it was easy enough to see from the way in which he gathered his legs for each spring that the centre horse was far the fresher of the three. And the rider appeared to be the leader of the party, for we continually saw the glint of his face in the moonshine as he looked back to measure the distance between us. At first it was only a glimmer, then it was cut across with a moustache, and at last when we began to feel their dust in our throats I could give a name to my man.

"Halt, Colonel de Montluc!" I shouted. "Halt in the Emperor's name!"

I had known him for years as a daring officer and an unprincipled rascal. Indeed, there was a score between us, for he had shot my friend, Treville, at Warsaw, pulling his trigger, as some said, a good second before the drop of the handkerchief.

Well, the words were hardly out of my mouth when his two comrades wheeled round and fired their pistols at us. I heard Despienne give a terrible cry, and at the same instant both Tremeau and I let drive at the same man. He fell forward with his hands swinging on each side of his horse's neck. His comrade spurred on to Tremeau, sabre in hand, and I heard the crash which comes when a strong cut is met by a stronger parry. For my own part I never turned my head, but I touched Violette with the spur for the first time and flew after the leader. That he should leave his comrades and fly was proof enough that I should leave mine and follow.

He had gained a couple of hundred paces, but the good little mare set that right before we could have passed two milestones. It was in vain that he spurred and thrashed like a gunner driver on a soft road. His hat flew off with his exertions, and his bald head gleamed in the moonshine. But do what he might, he still heard the rattle of the hoofs growing louder and louder behind

him. I could not have been twenty yards from him, and the shadow head was touching the shadow haunch, when he turned with a curse in his saddle and emptied both his pistols, one after the other, into Violette.

I have been wounded myself so often that I have to stop and think before I can tell you the exact number of times. I have been hit by musket balls, by pistol bullets and by bursting shells, besides being pierced by bayonet, lance, sabre and finally by a brad-awl, which was the most painful of any. Yet out of all these injuries I have never known the same deadly sickness as came over me when I felt the poor, silent, patient creature, which I had come to love more than anything in the world except my mother and the Emperor, reel and stagger beneath me. I pulled my second pistol from my holster and fired point-blank between the fellow's broad shoulders. He slashed his horse across the flank with his whip, and for a moment I thought that I had missed him. But then on the green of his chasseur jacket I saw an ever-widening black smudge, and he began to sway in his saddle, very slightly at first, but more and more with every bound, until at last over he went, with his foot caught in the stirrup and his shoulders thud-thud-thudding along the road, until the drag was too much for the tired horse, and I closed my hand upon the foam-spattered bridle-chain. As I pulled him up it eased the stirrup leather, and the spurred heel clinked loudly as it fell.

"Your papers!" I cried, springing from my saddle. "This instant!"

But even as I said it, the huddle of the green body and the fantastic sprawl of the limbs in the moonlight told me clearly enough that it was all over with him. My bullet had passed through his heart, and it was only his own iron will which had held him so long in the saddle. He had lived hard, this Montluc, and I will do him justice to say that he died hard also.

But it was the papers—always the papers—of which I

thought. I opened his tunic and I felt in his shirt. Then I searched his holsters and his sabre-tasche. Finally I dragged off his boots, and undid his horse's girth so as to hunt under the saddle. There was not a nook or crevice which I did not ransack. It was useless. They were not upon him.

When this stunning blow came upon me I could have sat down by the roadside and wept. Fate seemed to be fighting against me, and that is an enemy from whom even a gallant hussar might not be ashamed to flinch. I stood with my arm over the neck of my poor wounded Violette, and I tried to think it all out, that I might act in the wisest way. I was aware that the Emperor had no great respect for my wits, and I longed to show him that he had done me an injustice. Montluc had not the papers. And yet Montluc had sacrificed his companions in order to make his escape. I could make nothing of that. On the other hand, it was clear that, if he had not got them, one or other of his comrades had. One of them was certainly dead. The other I had left fighting with Tremeau, and if he escaped from the old swordsman he had still to pass me. Clearly, my work lay behind me.

I hammered fresh charges into my pistols after I had turned this over in my head. Then I put them back in the holsters, and I examined my little mare, she jerking her head and cocking her ears the while, as if to tell me that an old soldier like herself did not make a fuss about a scratch or two. The first shot had merely grazed her off-shoulder, leaving a skin-mark, as if she had brushed a wall. The second was more serious. It had passed through the muscle of her neck, but already it had ceased to bleed. I reflected that if she weakened I could mount Montluc's grey, and meanwhile I led him along beside us, for he was a fine horse, worth fifteen hundred francs at the least, and it seemed to me that no one had a better right to him than I.

Well, I was all impatience now to get back to the others, and I had just given Violette her head, when

suddenly I saw something glimmering in a field by the roadside. It was the brass-work upon the chasseur hat which had flown from Montluc's head ; and at the sight of it a thought made me jump in the saddle. How could the hat have flown off ? With its weight, would it not have simply dropped ? And here it lay, fifteen paces from the roadway ! Of course, he must have thrown it off when he had made sure that I would overtake him. And if he threw it off—I did not stop to reason any more, but sprang from the mare with my heart beating the *pas-de-charge*. Yes, it was all right this time. There, in the crown of the hat was stuffed a roll of papers in a parchment wrapper bound with yellow ribbon. I pulled it out with the one hand, and, holding the hat in the other, I danced for joy in the moonlight. The Emperor would see that he had not made a mistake when he put his affairs into the charge of Étienne Gerard.

I had a safe pocket on the inside of my tunic just over my heart, where I kept a few little things which were dear to me, and into this I thrust my precious roll. Then I sprang upon Violette, and was pushing forward to see what had become of Tremeau, when I saw a horseman riding across the field in the distance. At the same instant I heard the sound of hoofs approaching me, and there in the moonlight was the Emperor upon his white charger, dressed in his grey overcoat and his three-cornered hat, just as I had seen him so often upon the field of battle.

" Well ! " he cried, in the sharp, sergeant-major way of his. " Where are my papers ? "

I spurred forward and presented them without a word. He broke the ribbon and ran his eyes rapidly over them. Then, as we sat our horses head to tail, he threw his left arm across me with his hand upon my shoulder. Yes, my friends, simple as you see me, I have been embraced by my great master.

" Gerard," he cried, " you are a marvel ! "

I did not wish to contradict him, and it brought a

flush of joy upon my cheeks to know that he had done me justice at last.

"Where is the thief, Gerard?" he asked.

"Dead, sire."

"You killed him?"

"He wounded my horse, sire, and would have escaped had I not shot him."

"Did you recognise him?"

"De Montluc is his name, sire—a Colonel of Chasseurs."

"Tut," said the Emperor. "We have got the poor pawn, but the hand which plays the game is still out of our reach." He sat in silent thought for a little, with his chin sunk upon his chest. "Ah, Talleyrand, Talleyrand," I heard him mutter, "if I had been in your place and you in mine, you would have crushed a viper when you held it under your heel. For five years I have known you for what you are, and yet I have let you live to sting me. Never mind, my brave," he continued, turning to me, "there will come a day of reckoning for everybody, and when it arrives, I promise you that my friends will be remembered as well as my enemies."

"Sire," said I, for I had had time for thought as well as he, "if your plans about these papers have been carried to the ears of your enemies I trust you do not think that it was owing to any indiscretion upon the part of myself or of my comrades."

"It would be hardly reasonable for me to do so," he answered, "seeing that this plot was hatched in Paris, and that you only had your orders a few hours ago."

"Then how——?"

"Enough," he cried, sternly. "You take an undue advantage of your position."

That was always the way with the Emperor. He would chat with you as with a friend and a brother, and then when he had wiled you into forgetting the gulf which lay between you, he would suddenly, with a word or with a look, remind you that it was as impassable as

ever. When I have fondled my old hound until he has been encouraged to paw my knees, and I have then thrust him down again, it has made me think of the Emperor and his ways.

He reined his horse round, and I followed him in silence and with a heavy heart. But when he spoke again his words were enough to drive all thought of myself out of my mind.

"I could not sleep until I knew how you had fared," said he. "I have paid a price for my papers. There are not so many of my old soldiers left that I can afford to lose two in one night."

When he said "two" it turned me cold.

"Colonel Despienne was shot, sire," I stammered.

"And Captain Tremeau cut down. Had I been a few minutes earlier, I might have saved him. The other escaped across the fields."

I remembered that I had seen a horseman a moment before I had met the Emperor. He had taken to the fields to avoid me, but if I had known, and Violette been unwounded, the old soldier would not have gone unavenged. I was thinking sadly of his sword-play, and wondering whether it was his stiffening wrist which had been fatal to him, when Napoleon spoke again.

"Yes, Brigadier," said he, "you are now the only man who will know where these papers are concealed."

It must have been imagination, my friends, but for an instant I may confess that it seemed to me that there was a tone in the Emperor's voice which was not altogether one of sorrow. But the dark thought had hardly time to form itself in my mind before he let me see that I was doing him an injustice.

"Yes, I have paid a price for my papers," he said, and I heard them crackle as he put his hand up to his bosom. "No man has ever had more faithful servants—no man since the beginning of the world."

As he spoke we came upon the scene of the struggle. Colonel Despienne and the man whom we had shot lay

together some distance down the road, while their horses grazed contentedly beneath the poplars. Captain Tremeau lay in front of us upon his back, with his arms and legs stretched out, and his sabre broken short off in his hand. His tunic was open, and a huge blood-clot hung like a dark handkerchief out of a slit in his white shirt. I could see the gleam of his clenched teeth from under his immense moustache.

The Emperor sprang from his horse and bent down over the dead man.

"He was with me since Rivoli," said he, sadly. "He was one of my old grumblers in Egypt."

And the voice brought the man back from the dead. I saw his eyelids shiver. He twitched his arm, and moved the sword-hilt a few inches. He was trying to raise it in salute. Then the mouth opened, and the hilt tinkled down on to the ground.

"May we all die as gallantly," said the Emperor, as he rose, and from my heart I added "Amen."

There was a farm within fifty yards of where we were standing, and the farmer, roused from his sleep by the clatter of hoofs and the cracking of pistols, had rushed out to the roadside. We saw him now, dumb with fear and astonishment, staring open-eyed at the Emperor. It was to him that we committed the care of the four dead men and of the horses also. For my own part, I thought it best to leave Violette with him and to take De Montluc's grey with me, for he could not refuse to give me back my own mare, whilst there might be difficulties about the other. Besides, my little friend's wound had to be considered, and we had a long return ride before us.

The Emperor did not at first talk much upon the way. Perhaps the deaths of Despienne and Tremeau still weighed heavily upon his spirits. He was always a reserved man, and in those times, when every hour brought him the news of some success of his enemies or defection of his friends, one could not expect him to be a merry companion. Nevertheless, when I reflected that

he was carrying in his bosom those papers which he valued so highly, and which only a few hours ago appeared to be for ever lost, and when I further thought that it was I, Étienne Gerard, who had placed them there, I felt that I had deserved some little consideration. The same idea may have occurred to him, for when we had at last left the Paris high road, and had entered the forest, he began of his own accord to tell me that which I should have most liked to have asked him.

"As to the papers," said he, "I have already told you that there is no one now, except you and me, who knows where they are to be concealed. My Mameluke carried the spades to the pigeon-house, but I have told him nothing. Our plans, however, for bringing the packet from Paris have been formed since Monday. There were three in the secret, a woman and two men. The woman I would trust with my life; which of the two men has betrayed us I do not know, but I think that I may promise to find out."

We were riding in the shadow of the trees at the time, and I could hear him slapping his riding-whip against his boot, and taking pinch after pinch of snuff, as was his way when he was excited.

"You wonder, no doubt," said he, after a pause, "why these rascals did not stop the carriage at Paris instead of at the entrance to Fontainebleau."

In truth, the objection had not occurred to me, but I did not wish to appear to have less wits than he gave me credit for, so I answered that it was indeed surprising.

"Had they done so they would have made a public scandal, and run a chance of missing their end. Short of taking the berline to pieces, they could not have discovered the hiding-place. He planned it well—he could always plan well—and he chose his agents well also. But mine were the better."

It is not for me to repeat to you, my friends, all that was said to me by the Emperor as we walked our horses amid the black shadows and through the moon-silvered glades

of the great forest. Every word of it is impressed upon my memory, and before I pass away it is likely that I will place it all upon paper, so that others may read it in the days to come. He spoke freely of his past, and something also of his future; of the devotion of Macdonald, of the treason of Marmont, of the little King of Rome, concerning whom he talked with as much tenderness as any bourgeois father of a single child; and, finally, of his father-in-law, the Emperor of Austria, who would, he thought, stand between his enemies and himself. For myself, I dared not say a word, remembering how I had already brought a rebuke upon myself; but I rode by his side, hardly able to believe that this was indeed the great Emperor, the man whose glance sent a thrill through me, who was now pouring out his thoughts to me in short, eager sentences, the words rattling and racing like the hoofs of a galloping squadron. It is possible that, after the word-splittings and diplomacy of a Court, it was a relief to him to speak his mind to a plain soldier like myself.

In this way the Emperor and I—even after years it sends a flush of pride into my cheeks to be able to put those words together—the Emperor and I walked our horses through the Forest of Fontainebleau, until we came at last to the Colombier. The three spades were propped against the wall upon the right-hand side of the ruined door, and at the sight of them the tears sprang to my eyes as I thought of the hands for which they were intended. The Emperor seized one and I another.

"Quick!" said he. "The dawn will be upon us before we get back to the palace."

We dug the hole, and placing the papers in one of my pistol holsters to screen them from the damp, we laid them at the bottom and covered them up. We then carefully removed all marks of the ground having been disturbed, and we placed a large stone upon the top. I dare say that since the Emperor was a young gunner, and helped to train his pieces against Toulon, he had

not worked so hard with his hands. He was mopping his forehead with his silk handkerchief long before we had come to the end of our task.

The first grey cold light of morning was stealing through the tree trunks when we came out together from the old pigeon-house. The Emperor laid his hand upon my shoulder as I stood ready to help him to mount.

"We have left the papers there," said he, solemnly, "and I desire that you shall leave all thought of them there also. Let the recollection of them pass entirely from your mind, to be revived only when you receive a direct order under my own hand and seal. From this time onwards you forget all that has passed."

"I forget it, sire," said I.

We rode together to the edge of the town, where he desired that I should separate from him. I had saluted, and was turning my horse, when he called me back.

"It is easy to mistake the points of the compass in the forest," said he. "Would you not say that it was in the north-eastern corner that we buried them?"

"Buried what, sire?"

"The papers, of course," he cried, impatiently.

"What papers, sire?"

"Name of a name! Why, the papers that you have recovered for me."

"I am really at a loss to know what your Majesty is talking about."

He flushed with anger for a moment, and then he burst out laughing.

"Very good, Brigadier!" he cried. "I begin to believe that you are as good a diplomatist as you are a soldier, and I cannot say more than that."

So that was my strange adventure in which I found myself the friend and confident agent of the Emperor. When he returned from Elba he refrained from digging up the papers until his position should be secure, and they still remained in the corner of the old pigeon-house after

his exile to St. Helena. It was at this time that he was desirous of getting them into the hands of his own supporters, and for that purpose he wrote me, as I afterwards learned, three letters, all of which were intercepted by his guardians. Finally, he offered to support himself and his own establishment—which he might very easily have done out of the gigantic sum which belonged to him—if they would only pass one of his letters unopened. This request was refused, and so, up to his death in '21, the papers still remained where I have told you. How they came to be dug up by Count Bertrand and myself, and who eventually obtained them, is a story which I would tell you, were it not that the end has not yet come.

Some day you will hear of those papers, and you will see how, after he has been so long in his grave, that great man can still set Europe shaking. When that day comes, you will think of Étienne Gerard, and you will tell your children that you have heard the story from the lips of the man who was the only one living of all who took part in that strange history—the man who was tempted by Marshal Berthier, who led that wild pursuit upon the Paris road, who was honoured by the embrace of the Emperor, and who rode with him by moonlight in the Forest of Fontainebleau. The buds are bursting and the birds are calling, my friends. You may find better things to do in the sunlight than listening to the stories of an old, broken soldier. And yet you may well treasure what I say, for the buds will have burst and the birds sung in many seasons before France will see such another ruler as he whose servants we were proud to be.

ADVENTURES OF GERARD

1. *How the Brigadier lost his Ear*

IT was the old Brigadier who was talking in the café.

I have seen a great many cities, my friends. I would not dare to tell you how many I have entered as a conqueror with eight hundred of my little fighting devils clanking and jingling behind me. The cavalry were in front of the Grande Armée, and the Hussars of Conflans were in front of the cavalry, and I was in front of the Hussars. But of all the cities which we visited Venice is the most ill-built and ridiculous. I cannot imagine how the people who laid it out thought that the cavalry could manœuvre. It would puzzle Murat or Lasalle to bring a squadron into that square of theirs. For this reason we left Kellermann's heavy brigade and also my own Hussars at Padua on the mainland. But Suchet with the infantry held the town, and he had chosen me as his aide-de-camp for that winter, because he was pleased about the affair of the Italian fencing-master at Milan. The fellow was a good swordsman, and it was fortunate for the credit of French arms that it was I who was opposed to him. Besides, he deserved a lesson, for if one does not like a *prima donna's* singing one can always be silent, but it is intolerable that a public affront should be put upon a pretty woman. So the sympathy was all with me, and after the affair had blown over and the man's widow had been pensioned, Suchet chose me as his own galloper, and I followed him to Venice, where I had the strange adventure which I am about to tell you.

You have not been to Venice? No, for it is seldom

that the French travel. We were great travellers in those days. From Moscow to Cairo we had travelled everywhere, but we went in larger parties than were convenient to those whom we visited, and we carried our passports in our limbers. It will be a bad day for Europe when the French start travelling again, for they are slow to leave their homes ; but when they have done so no one can say how far they will go if they have a guide like our little man to point out the way. But the great days are gone and the great men are dead, and here am I, the last of them, drinking wine of Suresnes and telling old tales in a café.

But it is of Venice that I would speak. The folks there live like water-rats upon a mud-bank ; but the houses are very fine, and the churches, especially that of St. Mark, are as great as any I have seen. But, above all, they are all proud of their statues and their pictures, which are the most famous in Europe. There are many soldiers who think that because one's trade is to make war one should never have a thought above fighting and plunder. There was old Bouvet, for example—the one who was killed by the Prussians on the day that I won the Emperor's medal ; if you took him away from the camp and the canteen, and spoke to him of books, or of art, he would sit and stare at you. But the highest soldier is a man like myself who can understand the things of the mind and the soul. It is true that I was very young when I joined the army, and that the quarter-master was my only teacher ; but if you go about the world with your eyes open you cannot help learning a great deal.

Thus I was able to admire the pictures in Venice, and to know the names of the great men, Michael Titiens, and Angelus, and the others, who had painted them. No one can say that Napoleon did not admire them also, for the very first thing which he did when he captured the town was to send the best of them to Paris. We all took what we could get, and I had two pictures for my share. One of them, called " Nymphs Surprised," I kept for

myself, and the other, "Saint Barbara," I sent as a present to my mother.

It must be confessed, however, that some of our men behaved very badly in this matter of the statues and the pictures. The people at Venice were very much attached to them, and as to the four bronze horses which stood over the gate of their great church, they loved them as dearly as if they had been their children. I have always been a judge of a horse, and I had a good look at these ones, but I could not see that there was much to be said for them. They were too coarse-limbed for light cavalry chargers, and they had not the weight for the gun-teams. However, they were the only four horses, alive or dead, in the whole town, so it was not to be expected that the people would know any better. They wept bitterly when they were sent away, and ten French soldiers were found floating in the canals that night. As a punishment for these murders a great many more of their pictures were sent away, and the soldiers took to breaking the statues and firing their muskets at the stained-glass windows. This made the people furious, and there was very bad feeling in the town. Many officers and men disappeared during that winter, and even their bodies were never found.

For myself I had plenty to do, and I never found the time heavy on my hands. In every country it has been my custom to try to learn the language. For this reason I always look round for some lady who will be kind enough to teach it to me, and then we practise it together. This is the most interesting way of picking it up, and before I was thirty I could speak nearly every tongue in Europe; but it must be confessed that what you learn is not of much use for the ordinary purposes of life. My business, for example, has usually been with soldiers and peasants, and what advantage is it to be able to say to them that I love only them, and that I will come back when the wars are over?

Never have I had so sweet a teacher as in Venice.

Lucia was her first name, and her second—but a gentleman forgets second names. I can say this with all discretion, that she was of one of the senatorial families of Venice, and that her grandfather had been Doge of the town. She was of an exquisite beauty—and when I, Étienne Gerard, use such a word as "exquisite," my friends, it has a meaning. I have judgment, I have memories, I have the means of comparison. Of all the women who have loved me there are not twenty to whom I could apply such a term as that. But I say again that Lucia was exquisite. Of the dark type I do not recall her equal unless it were Dolores of Toledo. There was a little brunette whom I loved at Santarem when I was soldiering under Massena in Portugal—her name has escaped me. She was of a perfect beauty, but she had not the figure nor the grace of Lucia. There was Agnes, also. I could not put one before the other, but I do none an injustice when I say that Lucia was the equal of the best.

It was over this matter of pictures that I had first met her, for her father owned a palace on the farther side of the Rialto Bridge upon the Grand Canal, and it was so packed with wall-paintings that Suchet sent a party of sappers to cut some of them out and send them to Paris. I had gone down with them, and after I had seen Lucia in tears it appeared to me that the plaster would crack if it were taken from the support of the wall. I said so, and the sappers were withdrawn. After that I was the friend of the family, and many a flask of Chianti have I cracked with the father and many a sweet lesson have I had from the daughter. Some of our French officers married in Venice that winter, and I might have done the same, for I loved her with all my heart; but Étienne Gerard had his sword, his horse, his regiment, his mother, his Emperor and his career. A debonair Hussar has room in his heart for love, but none for a wife. So I thought then, my friends, but I did not see the lonely days when I should long to clasp those vanished

hands, and turn my head away when I saw old comrades with their tall children standing round their chairs. This love which I had thought was a joke and a plaything—it is only now that I understand that it is the moulder of one's life, the most solemn and sacred of all things. . . . Thank you, my friend, thank you! It is a good wine, and a second bottle cannot hurt.

And now I will tell you how my love for Lucia was the cause of one of the most terrible of all the wonderful adventures which have ever befallen me, and how it was that I came to lose the top of my right ear. You have often asked me why it was missing. To-night for the first time I will tell you.

Suchet's headquarters at that time was the old palace of the Doge Dandolo, which stands on the lagoon not far from the place of San Marco. It was near the end of the winter, and I had returned one night from the Theatre Goldini, when I found a note from Lucia and a gondola waiting. She prayed me to come to her at once as she was in trouble. To a Frenchman and a soldier there was but one answer to such a note. In an instant I was in the boat and the gondolier was pushing out into the dark lagoon. I remember that as I took my seat in the boat I was struck by the man's great size. He was not tall, but he was one of the broadest men that I have ever seen in my life. But the gondoliers of Venice are a strong breed, and powerful men are common enough among them. The fellow took his place behind me and began to row.

A good soldier in an enemy's country should everywhere and at all times be on the alert. It has been one of the rules of my life, and if I have lived to wear grey hairs it is because I have observed it. And yet upon that night I was as careless as a foolish young recruit who fears lest he should be thought to be afraid. My pistols I had left behind in my hurry. My sword was at my belt, but it is not always the most convenient of weapons. I lay back in my seat in the gondola, lulled by the gentle swish of the water and the steady creaking of the oar. Our way

lay through a network of narrow canals with high houses towering on either side and a thin slit of star-spangled sky above us. Here and there, on the bridges which spanned the canal, there was the dim glimmer of an oil lamp, and sometimes there came a gleam from some niche, where a candle burned before the image of a saint. But save for this it was all black, and one could only see the water by the white fringe which curled round the long black nose of our boat. It was a place and a time for dreaming. I thought of my own past life, of all the great deeds in which I had been concerned, of the horses that I had handled, and of the women that I had loved. Then I thought also of my dear mother, and I fancied her joy when she heard the folk in the village talking about the fame of her son. Of the Emperor also I thought, and of France, the dear fatherland, the sunny France, mother of beautiful daughters and of gallant sons. My heart glowed within me as I thought of how we had brought her colours so many hundred leagues beyond her borders. To her greatness I would dedicate my life. I placed my hand upon my heart as I swore it, and at that instant the gondolier fell upon me from behind.

When I say that he fell upon me I do not mean merely that he attacked me, but that he really did tumble upon me with all his weight. The fellow stands behind you and above you as he rows, so that you can neither see him nor can you in any way guard against such an assault. One moment I had sat with my mind filled with sublime resolutions, the next I was flattened out upon the bottom of the boat, the breath dashed out of my body, and this monster pinning me down. I felt the fierce pants of his hot breath upon the back of my neck. In an instant he had torn away my sword, and slipped a sack over my head, and had tied a rope firmly round the outside of it. There was I at the bottom of the gondola as helpless as a trussed fowl. I could not shout, I could not move ; I was a mere bundle. An instant later I heard once more the swishing of the water and the creaking of the oar. This fellow

had done his work and had resumed his journey as quietly and unconcernedly as if he were accustomed to clap a sack over a colonel of Hussars every day of the week.

I cannot tell you the humiliation and also the fury which filled my mind as I lay there like a helpless sheep being carried to the butcher's. I, Étienne Gerard, the champion of the six brigades of light cavalry and the first swordsman of the Grand Army, to be overpowered by a single, unarmed man in such a fashion! Yet I lay quiet, for there is a time to resist and there is a time to save one's strength. I had felt the fellow's grip upon my arms, and I knew that I would be a child in his hands. I waited quietly, therefore, with a heart which burned with rage, until my opportunity should come.

How long I lay there at the bottom of the boat I cannot tell; but it seemed to me to be a long time, and always there were the hiss of the waters and the steady creaking of the oars. Several times we turned corners, for I heard the long, sad cry which these gondoliers give when they wish to warn their fellows that they are coming. At last, after a considerable journey. I felt the side of the boat scrape up against a landing-place. The fellow knocked three times with his oar upon wood, and in answer to his summons I heard the rasping of bars and the turning of keys. A great door creaked back upon its hinges.

"Have you got him?" asked a voice, in Italian.

My monster gave a laugh and kicked the sack in which I lay.

"Here he is," said he.

"They are waiting." He added something which I could not understand.

"Take him, then," said my captor. He raised me in his arms, ascended some steps, and I was thrown down upon a hard floor. A moment later the bars creaked and the key whined once more. I was a prisoner inside a house.

From the voices and the steps there seemed now to be several people round me. I understand Italian a great deal better than I speak it, and I could make out very well what they were saying.

"You have not killed him, Matteo?"

"What matter if I have?"

"My faith, you will have to answer for it to the tribunal."

"They will kill him, will they not?"

"Yes, but it is not for you or me to take it out of their hands."

"Tut! I have not killed him. Dead men do not bite, and his cursed teeth met in my thumb as I pulled the sack over his head."

"He lies very quiet."

"Tumble him out and you will find he is lively enough."

The cord which bound me was undone and the sack drawn from over my head. With my eyes closed I lay motionless upon the floor.

"By the saints, Matteo, I tell you that you have broken his neck."

"Not I. He has only fainted. The better for him if he never came out of it again."

I felt a hand within my tunic.

"Matteo is right," said a voice. "His heart beats like a hammer. Let him lie and he will soon find his senses."

I waited for a minute or so and then I ventured to take a stealthy peep from between my lashes. At first I could see nothing, for I had been so long in darkness and it was but a dim light in which I found myself. Soon, however, I made out that a high and vaulted ceiling covered with painted gods and goddesses was arching over my head. This was no mean den of cut-throats into which I had been carried, but it must be the hall of some Venetian palace. Then, without movement, very slowly and stealthily I had a peep at the men who surrounded me. There was the gondolier, a swart, hard-faced, murderous ruffian, and beside him were three other men,

one of them a little, twisted fellow with an air of authority and several keys in his hand, the other two tall young servants in a smart livery. As I listened to their talk I saw that the small man was the steward of the house, and that the others were under his orders.

There were four of them, then, but the little steward might be left out of the reckoning. Had I a weapon I should have smiled at such odds as those. But, hand to hand, I was no match for the one even without three others to aid him. Cunning, then, not force, must be my aid. I wished to look round for some mode of escape, and in doing so I gave an almost imperceptible movement of my head. Slight as it was it did not escape my guardians.

"Come, wake up, wake up!" cried the steward.

"Get on your feet, little Frenchman," growled the gondolier. "Get up, I say!" and for the second time he spurned me with his foot.

Never in the world was a command obeyed so promptly as that one. In an instant I had bounded to my feet and rushed as hard as I could run to the back of the hall. They were after me as I have seen the English hounds follow a fox, but there was a long passage down which I tore. It turned to the left and again to the left, and then I found myself back in the hall once more. They were almost within touch of me and there was no time for thought. I turned towards the staircase, but two men were coming down it. I dodged back and tried the door through which I had been brought, but it was fastened with great bars and I could not loosen them. The gondolier was on me with his knife, but I met him with a kick on the body which stretched him on his back. His dagger flew with a clatter across the marble floor. I had no time to seize it, for there were half a dozen of them now clutching at me. As I rushed through them the little steward thrust his leg before me and I fell with a crash, but I was up in an instant, and breaking from their grasp I burst through the very middle of them and made for a

door at the other end of the hall. I reached it well in front of them, and I gave a shout of triumph as the handle turned freely in my hand, for I could see that it led to the outside and that all was clear for my escape. But I had forgotten this strange city in which I was. Every house is an island. As I flung open the door, ready to bound out into the street, the light of the hall shone upon the deep, still, black water which lay flush with the topmost step. I shrank back, and in an instant my pursuers were on me. But I am not taken so easily.

Again I kicked and fought my way through them, though one of them tore a handful of hair from my head in his effort to hold me. The little steward struck me with a key and I was battered and bruised, but once more I cleared a way in front of me. Up the grand staircase I rushed, burst open the pair of huge folding doors which faced me, and learned at last that my efforts were in vain.

The room into which I had broken was brilliantly lighted. With its gold cornices, its massive pillars, and its painted walls and ceilings it was evidently the grand hall of some famous Venetian palace. There are many hundred such in this strange city, any one of which has rooms which would grace the Louvre or Versailles. In the centre of this great hall there was a raised dais, and upon it in a half circle there sat twelve men all clad in black gowns, like those of a Franciscan monk, and each with a mask over the upper part of his face.

A group of armed men—rough-looking rascals—were standing round the door, and amid them facing the dais was a young fellow in the uniform of the light infantry. As he turned his head I recognised him. It was Captain Auret, of the 7th, a young Basque with whom I had drunk many a glass during the winter. He was deadly white, poor wretch, but he held himself manfully amid the assassins who surrounded him. Never shall I forget the sudden flash of hope which shone in his dark eyes when he saw a comrade burst into the room, or the look of

despair which followed as he understood that I had come not to change his fate but to share it.

You can think how amazed these people were when I hurled myself into their presence. My pursuers had crowded in behind me and choked the doorway, so that all further flight was out of the question. It is at such instants that my nature asserts itself. With dignity I advanced towards the tribunal. My jacket was torn, my hair was dishevelled, my head was bleeding, but there was that in my eyes and in my carriage which made them realise that no common man was before them. Not a hand was raised to arrest me until I halted in front of a formidable old man whose long grey beard and masterful manner told me that both by years and by character he was the man in authority.

" Sir," said I, " you will perhaps tell me why I have been forcibly arrested and brought to this place. I am an honourable soldier, as is this other gentleman here, and I demand that you will instantly set us both at liberty."

There was an appalling silence to my appeal. It is not pleasant to have twelve masked faces turned upon you and to see twelve pairs of vindictive Italian eyes fixed with fierce intentness upon your face. But I stood as a debonair soldier should, and I could not but reflect how much credit I was bringing upon the Hussars of Conflans by the dignity of my bearing. I do not think that anyone could have carried himself better under such difficult circumstances. I looked with a fearless face from one assassin to another, and I waited for some reply.

It was the greybeard who at last broke the silence.

" Who is this man ? " he asked.

" His name is Gerard," said the little steward at the door.

" Colonel Gerard," said I. " I will not deceive you. I am Étienne Gerard, *the* Colonel Gerard, five times mentioned in dispatches and recommended for the sword of honour. I am aide-de-camp to General Suchet, and I

demand my instant release, together with that of my comrade in arms."

The same terrible silence fell upon the assembly, and the same twelve pairs of merciless eyes were bent upon my face. Again it was the greybeard who spoke.

"He is out of his order. There are two names upon our list before him."

"He escaped from our hands and burst into the room."

"Let him await his turn. Take him down to the wooden cell."

"If he resist us, your excellency?"

"Bury your knives in his body. The tribunal will uphold you. Remove him until we have dealt with the others."

They advanced upon me and for an instant I thought of resistance. It would have been a heroic death, but who was there to see it or to chronicle it? I might be only postponing my fate, and yet I had been in so many bad places and come out unhurt that I had learned always to hope and to trust my star. I allowed these rascals to seize me, and I was led from the room, the gondolier walking at my side with a long naked knife in his hand. I could see in his brutal eyes the satisfaction which it would give him if he could find some excuse for plunging it into my body.

They are wonderful places, these great Venetian houses, palaces and fortresses and prisons all in one. I was led along a passage and down a bare stone stair until we came to a short corridor from which three doors opened. Through one of these I was thrust and the spring lock closed behind me. The only light came dimly through a small grating which opened on the passage. Peering and feeling, I carefully examined the chamber in which I had been placed. I understood from what I had heard that I should soon have to leave it again in order to appear before this tribunal, but still it is not my nature to throw away any possible chances.

The stone floor of the cell was so damp and the walls for

some feet high were so slimy and foul that it was evident they were beneath the level of the water. A single slanting hole high up near the ceiling was the only aperture for light or air. Through it I saw one bright star shining down upon me, and the sight filled me with comfort and with hope. I have never been a man of religion, though I have always had a respect for those who were, but I remember that night that the star shining down the shaft seemed to be an all-seeing eye which was upon me, and I felt as a young and frightened recruit might feel in battle when he saw the calm gaze of his colonel turned upon him.

Three of the sides of my prison were formed of stone, but the fourth was of wood, and I could see that it had only recently been erected. Evidently a partition had been thrown up to divide a single large cell into two smaller ones. There was no hope for me in the old walls, in the tiny window, or in the massive door. It was only in this one direction of the wooden screen that there was any possibility of exploring. My reason told me that if I should pierce it—which did not seem very difficult—it would only be to find myself in another cell as strong as that in which I then was. Yet I had always rather be doing something than doing nothing, so I bent all my attention and all my energies upon the wooden wall. Two planks were badly joined and so loose that I was certain I could easily detach them. I searched about for some tool, and I found one in the leg of a small bed which stood in the corner. I forced the end of this into the chink of the planks, and I was about to twist them outwards when the sound of rapid footsteps caused me to pause and to listen.

I wish I could forget what I heard. Many a hundred men have I seen die in battle, and I have slain more myself than I care to think of, but all that was fair fight and the duty of a soldier. It was a very different matter to listen to a murder in this den of assassins. They were pushing someone along the passage, someone who re-

sisted and who clung to my door as he passed. They must have taken him into the third cell, the one which was farthest from me. "Help! help!" cried a voice, and then I heard a blow and a scream. "Help! help!" cried the voice again, and then "Gerard! Colonel Gerard!" It was my poor captain of infantry whom they were slaughtering. "Murderers! murderers!" I yelled, and I kicked at my door, but again I heard him shout, and then everything was silent. A minute later there was a heavy splash, and I knew that no human eye would ever see Auret again. He had gone as a hundred others had gone whose names were missing from the roll-calls of their regiments during that winter in Venice.

The steps returned along the passage, and I thought that they were coming for me. Instead of that they opened the door of the cell next to mine, and they took someone out of it. I heard the steps die away up the stair. At once I renewed my work upon the planks, and within a very few minutes I had loosened them in such a way that I could remove and replace them at pleasure. Passing through the aperture I found myself in the farther cell, which, as I expected, was the other half of the one in which I had been confined. I was not any nearer to escape than I had been before, for there was no other wooden wall which I could penetrate, and the spring lock of the door had been closed. There were no traces to show who was my companion in misfortune. Closing the two loose planks behind me, I returned to my own cell, and waited there with all the courage which I could command for the summons which would probably be my death-knell.

It was a long time in coming, but at last I heard the sound of feet once more in the passage, and I nerved myself to listen to some other odious deed and to hear the cries of the poor victim. Nothing of the kind occurred, however, and the prisoner was placed in the cell without violence. I had no time to peep through my hole of communication, for next moment my own door was flung

open and my rascally gondolier, with the other assassins, came into the cell.

"Come, Frenchman," said he. He held his blood-stained knife in his great hairy hand, and I read in his fierce eyes that he only looked for some excuse in order to plunge it into my heart. Resistance was useless. I followed without a word. I was led up the stone stair and back into that gorgeous chamber in which I had left the secret tribunal. I was ushered in, but to my surprise it was not on me that their attention was fixed. One of their own number, a tall, dark young man, was standing before them and was pleading with them in low, earnest tones. His voice quivered with anxiety and his hands darted in and out or writhed together in an agony of entreaty. "You cannot do it! You cannot do it!" he cried. "I implore the tribunal to reconsider this decision."

"Stand aside, brother," said the old man who presided. "The case is decided and another is up for judgment."

"For Heaven's sake be merciful!" cried the young man.

"We have already been merciful," the other answered. "Death would have been a small penalty for such an offence. Be silent and let judgment take its course."

I saw the young man throw himself in an agony of grief into his chair. I had no time, however, to speculate as to what it was which was troubling him, for his eleven colleagues had already fixed their stern eyes upon me. The moment of fate had arrived.

"You are Colonel Gerard?" said the terrible old man.

"I am."

"Aide-de-camp to the robber who calls himself General Suchet, who in turn represents that arch-robber Buonaparte?"

It was on my lips to tell him that he was a liar, but there is a time to argue and a time to be silent.

"I am an honourable soldier," said I. "I have obeyed my orders and done my duty."

The blood flushed into the old man's face and his eyes blazed through his mask.

"You are thieves and murderers, every man of you," he cried. "What are you doing here? You are Frenchmen. Why are you not in France? Did we invite you to Venice? By what right are you here? Where are our pictures? Where are the horses of St. Mark? Who are you that you should pilfer those treasures which our fathers through so many centuries have collected? We were a great city when France was a desert. Your drunken, brawling, ignorant soldiers have undone the work of saints and heroes. What have you to say to it?"

He was, indeed, a formidable old man, for his white beard bristled with fury and he barked out the little sentences like a savage hound. For my part I could have told him that his pictures would be safe in Paris, that his horses were really not worth making a fuss about, and that he could see heroes—I say nothing of saints—without going back to his ancestors or even moving out of his chair. All this I could have pointed out, but one might as well argue with a Mameluke about religion. I shrugged my shoulders and said nothing.

"The prisoner has no defence," said one of my masked judges.

"Has anyone any observation to make before judgment is passed?" The old man glared round him at the others.

"There is one matter, your excellency," said another. "It can scarce be referred to without reopening a brother's wounds, but I would remind you that there is a very particular reason why an exemplary punishment should be inflicted in the case of this officer."

"I had not forgotten it," the old man answered. "Brother, if the tribunal has injured you in one direction, it will give you ample satisfaction in another."

The young man who had been pleading when I entered the room staggered to his feet.

"I cannot endure it," he cried. "Your excellency must forgive me. The tribunal can act without me. I am ill! I am mad!" He flung his hands up with a furious gesture and rushed from the room.

"Let him go! Let him go!" said the president. "It is, indeed, more than can be asked of flesh and blood that he should remain under this roof. But he is a true Venetian, and when the first agony is over he will understand that it could not be otherwise."

I had been forgotten during this episode, and though I am not a man who is accustomed to being overlooked I should have been all the happier had they continued to neglect me. But now the old president glared at me again like a tiger who comes back to his victim.

"You shall pay for it all, and it is but justice that you should," said he. "You, an upstart adventurer and foreigner, have dared to raise your eyes in love to the grand-daughter of a Doge of Venice who was already betrothed to the heir of the Loredans. He who enjoys such privileges must pay a price for them."

"It cannot be higher than they are worth," said I.

"You will tell us that when you have made a part payment," he said. "Perhaps your spirit may not be so proud by that time. Matteo, you will lead this prisoner to the wooden cell. To-night is Monday. Let him have no food or water, and let him be led before the tribunal again on Wednesday night. We shall then decide upon the death which he is to die."

It was not a pleasant prospect, and yet it was a reprieve. One is thankful for small mercies when a hairy savage with a bloodstained knife is standing at one's elbow. He dragged me from the room and I was thrust down the stairs and back into my cell. The door was locked and I was left to my reflections.

My first thought was to establish connection with my neighbour in misfortune. I waited until the steps had

died away, and then I cautiously drew aside the two boards and peeped through. The light was very dim, so dim that I could only just discern a figure huddled in the corner, and I could hear the low whisper of a voice which prayed as one prays who is in deadly fear. The boards must have made a creaking. There was a sharp exclamation of surprise.

"Courage, friend, courage!" I cried. "All is not lost. Keep a stout heart, for Étienne Gerard is by your side."

"Étienne!" It was a woman's voice which spoke—a voice which was always music to my ears. I sprang through the gap and I flung my arms round her. "Lucia! Lucia!" I cried.

It was "Étienne!" and "Lucia!" for some minutes, for one does not make speeches at moments like that. It was she who came to her senses first.

"Oh, Étienne, they will kill you. How came you into their hands?"

"In answer to your letter."

"I wrote no letter."

"The cunning demons! But you?"

"I came also in answer to your letter."

"Lucia, I wrote no letter."

"They have trapped us both with the same bait."

"I care nothing about myself, Lucia. Besides, there is no pressing danger with me. They have simply returned me to my cell."

"Oh, Étienne, Étienne, they will kill you. Lorenzo is there."

"The old greybeard?"

"No, no, a young dark man. He loved me, and I thought I loved him until—until I learned what love is, Étienne. He will never forgive you. He has a heart of stone."

"Let them do what they like. They cannot rob me of the past, Lucia. But you—what about you?"

"It will be nothing, Étienne. Only a pang for an

instant and then all over. They mean it as a badge of infamy, dear, but I will carry it like a crown of honour since it was through you that I gained it."

Her words froze my blood with horror. All my adventures were insignificant compared to this terrible shadow which was creeping over my soul.

"Lucia! Lucia!" I cried. "For pity's sake tell me what these butchers are about to do. Tell me, Lucia! Tell me!"

"I will not tell you, Étienne, for it would hurt you far more than it would me. Well, well, I will tell you lest you should fear it was something worse. The president has ordered that my ear be cut off, that I may be marked for ever as having loved a Frenchman."

Her ear! The dear little ear which I had kissed so often. I put my hand to each little velvet shell to make certain that this sacrilege had not yet been committed. Only over my dead body should they reach them. I swore it to her between my clenched teeth.

"You must not care, Étienne. And yet I love that you should care all the same."

"They shall not hurt you—the fiends!"

"I have hopes, Étienne. Lorenzo is there. He was silent while I was judged, but he may have pleaded for me after I was gone."

"He did. I heard him."

"Then he may have softened their hearts."

I knew that it was not so, but how could I bring myself to tell her? I might as well have done so, for with the quick instinct of woman my silence was speech to her.

"They would not listen to him! You need not fear to tell me, dear, for you will find that I am worthy to be loved by such a soldier. Where is Lorenzo now?"

"He left the hall."

"Then he may have left the house as well."

"I believe that he did."

"He has abandoned me to my fate. Étienne, Étienne, they are coming!"

Afar off I heard those fateful steps and the jingle of distant keys. What were they coming for now, since there were no other prisoners to drag to judgment. It could only be to carry out the sentence upon my darling. I stood between her and the door, with the strength of a lion in my limbs. I would tear the house down before they should touch her.

"Go back! Go back!" she cried. "They will murder you, Étienne. My life, at least, is safe. For the love you bear me, Étienne, go back. It is nothing. I will make no sound. You will not hear that it is done."

She wrestled with me, this delicate creature, and by main force she dragged me to the opening between the cells. But a sudden thought had crossed my mind.

"We may yet be saved," I whispered. "Do what I tell you at once and without argument. Go into my cell. Quick!"

I pushed her through the gap and helped her to replace the planks. I had retained her cloak in my hands, and with this wrapped round me I crept into the darkest corner of her cell. There I lay when the door was opened and several men came in. I had reckoned that they would bring no lantern, for they had none with them before. To their eyes I was only a black blur in the corner.

"Bring a light," said one of them.

"No, no; curse it!" cried a rough voice, which I knew to be that of the ruffian Matteo. "It is not a job that I like, and the more I saw it the less I should like it. I am sorry, signora, but the order of the tribunal has to be obeyed."

My impulse was to spring to my feet and to rush through them all and out by the open door. But how would that help Lucia? Suppose that I got clear away, she would be in their hands until I could come back with help, for single-handed I could not hope to clear a way for her. All this flashed through my mind in an instant, and I saw that the only course for me was to lie still, take

what came, and wait my chance. The fellow's coarse hand felt among my curls—those curls in which only a woman's fingers had ever wandered. The next instant he gripped my ear, and a pain shot through me as if I had been touched with a hot iron. I bit my lip to stifle a cry, and I felt the blood run warm down my neck and back.

"There, thank Heaven that's over," said the fellow, giving me a friendly pat on the head. "You're a brave girl, signora, I'll say that for you, and I only wish you'd have better taste than to love a Frenchman. You can blame him and not me for what I have done."

What could I do save to lie still and grind my teeth at my own helplessness? At the same time my pain and my rage were always soothed by the reflection that I had suffered for the woman whom I loved. It is the custom of men to say to ladies that they would willingly endure any pain for their sake, but it was my privilege to show that I had said no more than I meant. I thought also how nobly I would seem to have acted if ever the story came to be told, and how proud the regiment of Conflans might well be of their colonel. These thoughts helped me to suffer in silence while the blood still trickled over my neck and dripped upon the stone floor. It was that sound which nearly led to my destruction.

"She's bleeding fast," said one of the valets. "You had best fetch a surgeon or you will find her dead in the morning."

"She lies very still and she has never opened her mouth," said another. "The shock has killed her."

"Nonsense; a young woman does not die so easily." It was Matteo who spoke. "Besides, I did but snip off enough to leave the tribunal's mark upon her. Rouse up, signora, rouse up!"

He shook me by the shoulder, and my heart stood still for fear he should feel the epaulette under the mantle.

"How is it with you now?" he asked.

I made no answer.

"Curse it! I wish I had to do with a man instead of a woman, and the fairest woman in Venice," said the gondolier. "Here, Nicholas, lend me your handkerchief and bring a light."

It was all over. The worst had happened. Nothing could save me. I still crouched in the corner, but I was tense in every muscle, like a wild cat about to spring. If I had to die I was determined that my end should be worthy of my life.

One of them had gone for a lamp, and Matteo was stooping over me with a handkerchief. In another instant my secret would be discovered. But he suddenly drew himself straight and stood motionless. At the same instant there came a confused murmuring sound through the little window far above my head. It was the rattle of oars and the buzz of many voices. Then there was a crash upon the door upstairs, and a terrible voice roared: "Open! Open in the name of the Emperor!"

The Emperor! It was like the mention of some saint which, by its very sound, can frighten the demons. Away they ran with cries of terror—Matteo, the valets, the steward, all of the murderous gang. Another shout and then the crash of a hatchet and the splintering of planks. There were the rattle of arms and the cries of French soldiers in the hall. Next instant feet came flying down the stair and a man burst frantically into my cell.

"Lucia!" he cried, "Lucia!" He stood in the dim light, panting and unable to find his words. Then he broke out again. "Have I not shown you how I love you, Lucia? What more could I do to prove it? I have betrayed my country, I have broken my vow, I have ruined my friends, and I have given my life in order to save you."

It was young Lorenzo Loredan, the lover whom I had superseded. My heart was heavy for him at the time, but after all it is every man for himself in love, and if one

fails in the game it is some consolation to lose to one who can be a graceful and considerate winner. I was about to point this out to him, but at the first word I uttered he gave a shout of astonishment, and, rushing out, he seized the lamp which hung in the corridor and flashed it in my face.

"It is you, you villain!" he cried. "You French coxcomb. You shall pay me for the wrong which you have done me."

But the next instant he saw the pallor of my face and the blood which was still pouring from my head.

"What is this?" he asked. "How come you to have lost your ear?"

I shook off my weakness and, pressing my handkerchief to my wound, I rose from my couch, the debonair colonel of Hussars.

"My injury, sir, is nothing. With your permission we will not allude to a matter so trifling and so personal."

But Lucia had burst through from her cell and was pouring out the whole story while she clasped Lorenzo's arm.

"This noble gentleman—he has taken my place, Lorenzo! He has borne it for me. He has suffered that I might be saved."

I could sympathise with the struggle which I could see in the Italian's face. At last he held out his hand to me.

"Colonel Gerard," he said, "you are worthy of a great love. I forgive you, for if you have wronged me you have made a noble atonement. But I wonder to see you alive. I left the tribunal before you were judged, but I understood that no mercy would be shown to any Frenchman since the destruction of the ornaments of Venice."

"He did not destroy them," cried Lucia. "He has helped to preserve those in our palace."

"One of them, at any rate," said I, as I stooped and kissed her hand.

This was the way, my friends, in which I lost my ear.

Lorenzo was found stabbed to the heart in the Piazza of St. Mark within two days of the night of my adventure. Of the tribunal and its ruffians, Matteo and three others were shot, the rest banished from the town. Lucia, my lovely Lucia, retired into a convent at Murano after the French had left the city, and there she still may be, some gentle lady abbess who has perhaps long forgotten the days when our hearts throbbed together, and when the whole great world seemed so small a thing beside the love which burned in our veins. Or perhaps it may not be so. Perhaps she has not forgotten. There may still be times when the peace of the cloister is broken by the memory of the old soldier who loved her in those distant days. Youth is past and passion is gone, but the soul of the gentleman can never change, and still Étienne Gerard would bow his grey head before her and would very gladly lose this other ear if he might do her a service.

2. *How the Brigadier captured Saragossa*

HAVE I ever told you, my friends, the circumstances connected with my joining the Hussars of Conflans at the time of the siege of Saragossa, and the very remarkable exploit which I performed in connection with the taking of that city? No? Then you have indeed something still to learn. I will tell it to you exactly as it occurred. Save for two or three men and a score or two of women, you are the first who have ever heard the story.

You must know, then, that it was in the 2nd Hussars—called the Hussars of Chamberan—that I had served as a lieutenant and as a junior captain. At the time I speak of I was only twenty-five years of age, as reckless and desperate a man as any in that great army. It chanced that the war had come to a halt in Germany, while it was still raging in Spain; so the Emperor, wishing to reinforce the Spanish army, transferred me as senior captain to the

Hussars of Conflans, which were at that time in the 5th Army Corps under Marshal Lannes.

It was a long journey from Berlin to the Pyrenees. My new regiment formed part of the force which, under Marshal Lannes, was then besieging the Spanish town of Saragossa. I turned my horse's head in that direction, therefore, and behold me a week or so later at the French headquarters, whence I was directed to the camp of the Hussars of Conflans.

You have read, no doubt, of this famous siege of Saragossa, and I will only say that no general could have had a harder task than that with which Marshal Lannes was confronted. The immense city was crowded with a horde of Spaniards—soldiers, peasants, priests—all filled with the most furious hatred of the French, and the most savage determination to perish before they would surrender. There were eighty thousand men in the town and only thirty thousand to besiege them. Yet we had a powerful artillery, and our Engineers were of the best. There was never such a siege, for it is usual that when the fortifications are taken the city falls ; but here it was not until the fortifications were taken that the real fighting began. Every house was a fort and every street a battlefield, so that slowly, day by day, we had to work our way inwards, blowing up the houses with their garrisons until more than half the city had disappeared. Yet the other half was as determined as ever, and in a better position for defence, since it consisted of enormous convents and monasteries with walls like the Bastille, which could not be so easily brushed out of our way. This was the state of things at the time that I joined the army.

I will confess to you that cavalry are not of much use in a siege, although there was a time when I would not have permitted anyone to have made such an observation. The Hussars of Conflans were encamped to the south of the town, and it was their duty to throw out patrols and to make sure that no Spanish force was advancing from that quarter. The colonel of the regiment was not a

good soldier, and the regiment was at that time very far from being in the high condition which it afterwards attained. Even in that one evening I saw several things which shocked me; for I had a high standard, and it went to my heart to see an ill-arranged camp, an ill-groomed horse, or a slovenly trooper. That night I supped with twenty-six of my new brother-officers, and I fear that in my zeal I showed them only too plainly that I found things very different to what I was accustomed to in the army of Germany. There was silence in the mess after my remarks, and I felt that I had been indiscreet when I saw the glances that were cast at me. The colonel especially was furious, and a great major named Olivier, who was the fire-eater of the regiment, sat opposite to me curling his huge black moustaches, and staring at me as if he would eat me. However, I did not resent his attitude, for I felt that I had indeed been indiscreet, and that it would give a bad impression if upon this my first evening I quarrelled with my superior officer.

So far I admit that I was wrong, but now I come to the sequel. Supper over, the colonel and some other officers left the room, for it was in a farmhouse that the mess was held. There remained a dozen or so, and a goat-skin of Spanish wine having been brought in, we all made merry. Presently this Major Olivier asked me some questions concerning the army of Germany and as to the part which I had myself played in the campaign. Flushed with the wine, I was drawn on from story to story. It was not unnatural, my friends. You will sympathise with me. Up there I had been the model for every officer of my years in the army. I was the first swordsman, the most dashing rider, the hero of a hundred adventures. Here I found myself not only unknown, but even disliked. Was it not natural that I should wish to tell these brave comrades what sort of man it was that had come among them? Was it not natural that I should wish to say, "Rejoice, my friends, rejoice! It is no ordinary man who has joined you to-night, but it is

I, *the* Gerard, the hero of Ratisbon, the victor of Jena, the man who broke the square at Austerlitz ? " I could not say all this. But I could at least tell them some incidents which would enable them to say it for themselves. I did so. They listened unmoved. I told them more. At last, after my tale of how I had guided the army across the Danube, one universal shout of laughter broke from them all. I sprang to my feet, flushed with shame and anger. They had drawn me on. They were making game of me. They were convinced that they had to do with a braggart and a liar. Was this my reception in the Hussars of Conflans ? I dashed the tears of mortification from my eyes, and they laughed the more at the sight.

" Do you know, Captain Pelletan, whether Marshal Lannes is still with the army ? " asked the major.

" I believe that he is, sir," said the other.

" Really, I should have thought that his presence was hardly necessary now that Captain Gerard has arrived."

Again there was a roar of laughter. I can see the ring of faces, the mocking eyes, the open mouths—Olivier with his great black bristles, Pelletan thin and sneering, even the young sub-lieutenants convulsed with merriment. Heavens, the indignity of it ! But my rage had dried my tears. I was myself again, cold, quiet, self-contained, ice without and fire within.

" May I ask, sir," said I to the major, " at what hour the regiment is paraded ? "

" I trust, Captain Gerard, that you do not mean to alter our hours," said he, and again there was a burst of laughter, which died away as I looked slowly round the circle.

" What hour is the assembly ? " I asked, sharply, of Captain Pelletan.

Some mocking answer was on his tongue, but my glance kept it there. " The assembly is at six," he answered.

" I thank you," said I. I then counted the company,

and found that I had to do with fourteen officers, two of whom appeared to be boys fresh from St. Cyr. I could not condescend to take any notice of their indiscretion. There remained the major, four captains and seven lieutenants.

"Gentlemen," I continued, looking from one to the other of them, "I should feel myself unworthy of this famous regiment if I did not ask you for satisfaction for the rudeness with which you have greeted me, and I should hold you to be unworthy of it if on any pretext you refused to grant it."

"You will have no difficulty upon that score," said the major. "I am prepared to waive my rank and to give you every satisfaction in the name of the Hussars of Conflans."

"I thank you," I answered. "I feel, however, that I have some claim upon these other gentlemen who laughed at my expense."

"Whom would you fight, then?" asked Captain Pelletan.

"All of you," I answered.

They looked in surprise from one to the other. Then they drew off to the other end of the room, and I heard the buzz of their whispers. They were laughing. Evidently they still thought that they had to do with some empty braggart. Then they returned.

"Your request is unusual," said Major Olivier, "but it will be granted. How do you propose to conduct such a duel? The terms lie with you."

"Sabres," said I. "And I will take you in order of seniority, beginning with you, Major Olivier, at five o'clock. I will thus be able to devote five minutes to each before the assembly is blown. I must, however, beg you to have the courtesy to name the place of meeting, since I am still ignorant of the locality."

They were impressed by my cold and practical manner. Already the smile had died away from their lips. Olivier's face was no longer mocking, but it was dark and stern.

"There is a small open space behind the horse lines," said he. "We have held a few affairs of honour there, and it has done very well. We shall be there, Captain Gerard, at the hour you name."

I was in the act of bowing to thank them for their acceptance when the door of the mess-room was flung open and the colonel hurried into the room, with an agitated face.

"Gentlemen," said he, "I have been asked to call for a volunteer from among you for a service which involves the greatest possible danger. I will not disguise from you that the matter is serious in the last degree, and that Marshal Lannes has chosen a cavalry officer because he can be better spared than an officer of infantry or of Engineers. Married men are not eligible. Of the others, who will volunteer!"

I need not say that all the unmarried officers stepped to the front. The colonel looked round in some embarrassment. I could see his dilemma. It was the best man who should go, and yet it was the best man whom he could least spare.

"Sir," said I, "may I be permitted to make a suggestion?"

He looked at me with a hard eye. He had not forgotten my observations at supper. "Speak!" said he.

"I would point out, sir," said I, "that this mission is mine both by right and by convenience."

"Why so, Captain Gerard?"

"By right, because I am the senior captain. By convenience, because I shall not be missed in the regiment, since the men have not yet learned to know me."

The colonel's features relaxed.

"There is certainly truth in what you say, Captain Gerard," said he. "I think that you are indeed best fitted to go upon this mission. If you will come with me I will give you your instructions."

I wished my new comrades good-night as I left the room, and I repeated that I should hold myself at their

disposal at five o'clock next morning. They bowed in silence, and I thought that I could see, from the expression of their faces, that they had already begun to take a more just view of my character.

I had expected that the colonel would at once inform me what it was that I had been chosen to do, but instead of that he walked on in silence, I following behind him. We passed through the camp and made our way across the trenches and over the ruined heaps of stones which marked the old wall of the town. Within there was a labyrinth of passages, formed among the debris of the houses which had been destroyed by the mines of the Engineers. Acres and acres were covered with splintered walls and piles of brick which had once been a populous suburb. Lanes had been driven through it and lanterns placed at the corners with inscriptions to direct the wayfarer. The colonel hurried onwards until at last, after a long walk, we found our way barred by a high grey wall which stretched right across our path. Here behind a barricade lay our advanced guard. The colonel led me into a roofless house, and there I found two general officers, a map stretched over a drum in front of them, they kneeling beside it and examining it carefully by the light of a lantern. The one with the clean-shaven face and the twisted neck was Marshal Lannes, the other was General Razout, the head of the Engineers.

"Captain Gerard has volunteered to go," said the colonel.

Marshal Lannes rose from his knees and shook me by the hand.

"You are a brave man, sir," said he. "I have a present to make to you," he added, handing me a very tiny glass tube. "It has been specially prepared by Dr. Fardet. At the supreme moment you have but to put it to your lips and you will be dead in an instant."

This was a cheerful beginning. I will confess to you, my friends, that a cold chill passed up my back and my hair rose upon my head.

" Excuse me, sir," said I, as I saluted, " I am aware that I have volunteered for a service of great danger, but the exact details have not yet been given to me."

" Colonel Perrin," said Lannes, severely, " it is unfair to allow this brave officer to volunteer before he has learned what the perils are to which he will be exposed."

But already I was myself once more.

" Sir," said I, " permit me to remark that the greater the danger the greater the glory, and that I could only repent of volunteering if I found that there were no risks to be run."

It was a noble speech, and my appearance gave force to my words. For the moment I was an heroic figure. As I saw Lannes's eyes fixed in admiration upon my face it thrilled me to think how splendid was the début which I was making in the army of Spain. If I died that night my name would not be forgotten. My new comrades and my old, divided in all else, would still have a point of union in their love and admiration of Étienne Gerard.

" General Razout, explain the situation ! " said Lannes, briefly.

The Engineer officer rose, his compasses in his hand. He led me to the door and pointed to the high grey wall which towered up amongst the debris of the shattered houses.

" That is the enemy's present line of defence," said he. " It is the wall of the great Convent of the Madonna. If we can carry it the city must fall, but they have run countermines all round it, and the walls are so enormously thick that it would be an immense labour to breach it with artillery. We happen to know, however, that the enemy have a considerable store of powder in one of the lower chambers. If that could be exploded the way would be clear for us."

" How can it be reached ? " I asked.

" I will explain. We have a French agent within the town named Hubert. This brave man has been in constant communication with us, and he had promised to

explode the magazine. It was to be done in the early morning, and for two days running we have had a storming party of a thousand Grenadiers waiting for the breach to be formed. But there has been no explosion, and for these two days we have had no communication from Hubert. The question is, what has become of him ? "

" You wish me to go and see ? "

" Precisely. Is he ill, or wounded, or dead ? Shall we still wait for him, or shall we attempt the attack elsewhere ? We cannot determine this until we have heard from him. This is a map of the town, Captain Gerard. You perceive that within this ring of convents and monasteries are a number of streets which branch off from a central square. If you come so far as this square you will find the cathedral at one corner. In that corner is the street of Toledo. Hubert lives in a small house between a cobbler's and a wine-shop, on the right-hand side as you go from the cathedral. Do you follow me ? "

" Clearly."

" You are to reach that house, to see him, and to find out if his plan is still feasible or if we must abandon it." He produced what appeared to be a roll of dirty brown flannel. " This is the dress of a Franciscan friar," said he. " You will find it the most useful disguise."

I shrank away from it.

" It turns me into a spy," I cried. " Surely I can go in my uniform ? "

" Impossible ! How could you hope to pass through the streets of the city ? Remember, also, that the Spaniards take no prisoners, and that your fate will be the same in whatever dress you are taken."

It was true, and I had been long enough in Spain to know that that fate was likely to be something more serious than mere death. All the way from the frontier I had heard grim tales of torture and mutilation. I enveloped myself in the Franciscan gown.

" Now I am ready."

"Are you armed?"

"My sabre."

"They will hear it clank. Take this knife and leave your sword. Tell Hubert that at four o'clock before dawn the storming party will again be ready. There is a sergeant outside who will show you how to get into the city. Good-night, and good luck!"

Before I had left the room the two generals had their cocked hats touching each other over the map. At the door an under-officer of Engineers was waiting for me. I tied the girdle of my gown, and taking off my busby I drew the cowl over my head. My spurs I removed. Then in silence I followed my guide.

It was necessary to move with caution, for the walls above were lined by the Spanish sentries, who fired down continually at our advanced posts. Slinking along under the very shadow of the great convent, we picked our way slowly and carefully among the piles of ruins until we came to a large chestnut tree. Here the sergeant stopped.

"It is an easy tree to climb," said he. "A scaling ladder would not be simpler. Go up it, and you will find that the top branch will enable you to step upon the roof of that house. After that it is your guardian angel who must be your guide, for I can help you no more."

Girding up the heavy brown gown, I ascended the tree as directed. A half-moon was shining brightly, and the line of roof stood out dark and hard against the purple, starry sky. The tree was in the shadow of the house. Slowly I crept from branch to branch until I was near the top. I had but to climb along a stout limb in order to reach the wall. But suddenly my ears caught the patter of feet, and I cowered against the trunk and tried to blend myself with its shadow. A man was coming towards me on the roof. I saw his dark figure creeping along, his body crouching, his head advanced, the barrel of his gun protruding. His whole bearing was full of caution and suspicion. Once or twice he paused, and then came on again until he had reached the edge of

the parapet within a few yards of me. Then he knelt down, levelled his musket, and fired.

I was so astonished at this sudden crash at my very elbow that I nearly fell out of the tree. For an instant I could not be sure that he had not hit me. But when I heard a deep groan from below, and the Spaniard leaned over the parapet and laughed aloud, I understood what had occurred. It was my poor, faithful sergeant who had waited to see the last of me. The Spaniard had seen him standing under the tree and had shot him. You will think that it was good shooting in the dark, but these people use trebucos, or blunderbusses, which are filled up with all sorts of stones and scraps of metal, so that they will hit you as certainly as I have hit a pheasant on a branch. The Spaniard stood peering down through the darkness, while an occasional groan from below showed that the sergeant was still living. The sentry looked round and everything was still and safe. Perhaps he thought that he would like to finish off this accursed Frenchman, or perhaps he had a desire to see what was in his pockets; but whatever his motive he laid down his gun, leaned forward, and swung himself into the tree. The same instant I buried my knife in his body, and he fell with a loud crashing through the branches and came with a thud to the ground. I heard a short struggle below and an oath or two in French. The wounded sergeant had not waited long for his vengeance.

For some minutes I did not dare to move, for it seemed certain that someone would be attracted by the noise. However, all was silent save for the chimes striking mid-night in the city. I crept along the branch and lifted myself on to the roof. The Spaniard's gun was lying there, but it was of no service to me, since he had the powder-horn at his belt. At the same time, if it were found it would warn the enemy that something had happened, so I thought it best to drop it over the wall. Then I looked round for the means of getting off the roof and down into the city.

It was very evident that the simplest way by which I could get down was that by which the sentinel had got up, and what this was soon became evident. A voice along the roof called "Manuelo! Manuelo!" several times, and, crouching in the shadow, I saw in the moonlight a bearded head, which protruded from a trap-door. Receiving no answer to his summons the man climbed through, followed by three other fellows all armed to the teeth. You will see here how important it is not to neglect small precautions, for had I left the man's gun where I found it a search must have followed, and I should certainly have been discovered. As it was, the patrol saw no sign of their sentry and thought, no doubt, that he had moved along the line of the roofs. They hurried on, therefore, in that direction, and I, the instant that their backs were turned, rushed to the open trap-door and descended the flight of steps which led from it. The house appeared to be an empty one, for I passed through the heart of it and out, by an open door, into the street beyond.

It was a narrow and deserted lane, but it opened into a broader road, which was dotted with fires, round which a great number of soldiers and peasants were sleeping. The smell within the city was so horrible that one wondered how people could live in it, for during the months that the siege had lasted there had been no attempt to cleanse the streets or to bury the dead. Many people were moving up and down from fire to fire, and among them I observed several monks. Seeing that they came and went unquestioned, I took heart and hurried on my way in the direction of the great square. Once a man rose from beside one of the fires and stopped me by seizing my sleeve. He pointed to a woman who lay motionless upon the road, and I took him to mean that she was dying, and that he desired me to administer the last offices of the Church. I sought refuge, however, in the very little Latin that was left to me. "Ora pro nobis," said I, from the depths of my cowl. "Te

deum laudamus. Ora pro nobis." I raised my hand as I spoke and pointed forwards. The fellow released my sleeve and shrank back in silence, while I, with a solemn gesture, hurried upon my way.

As I had imagined, this broad boulevard led out into the central square, which was full of troops and blazing with fires. I walked swiftly onwards, disregarding one or two people who addressed remarks to me. I passed the cathedral and followed the street which had been described to me. Being upon the side of the city which was farthest from our attack, there were no troops encamped in it, and it lay in darkness, save for an occasional glimmer in a window. It was not difficult to find the house to which I had been directed, between the wine-shop and the cobbler's. There was no light within, and the door was shut. Cautiously I pressed the latch, and I felt that it had yielded. Who was within I could not tell, and yet I must take the risk. I pushed the door open and entered.

It was pitch-dark within—the more so as I had closed the door behind me. I felt round and came upon the edge of a table. Then I stood still and wondered what I should do next, and how I could gain some news of this Hubert, in whose house I found myself. Any mistake would cost me not only my life, but the failure of my mission. Perhaps he did not live alone. Perhaps he was only a lodger in a Spanish family, and my visit might bring ruin to him as well as to myself. Seldom in my life have I been more perplexed. And then, suddenly, something turned my blood cold in my veins. It was a voice, a whispering voice, in my very ear. "Mon Dieu!" cried the voice in a tone of agony. "Oh, mon Dieu! mon Dieu!" Then there was a dry sob in the darkness, and all was still once more.

It thrilled me with horror, that terrible voice; but it thrilled me also with hope, for it was the voice of a Frenchman.

"Who is there?" I asked.

There was a groaning, but no reply.

" Is that you, Monsieur Hubert ? "

" Yes, yes," sighed the voice, so low that I could hardly hear it. " Water, water, for Heaven's sake, water ! "

I advanced in the direction of the sound, but only to come in contact with the wall. Again I heard a groan, but this time there could be no doubt that it was above my head. I put up my hands, but they felt only empty air.

" Where are you ? " I cried.

" Here ! Here ! " whispered the strange, tremulous voice. I stretched my hand along the wall, and I came upon a man's naked foot. It was as high as my face, and yet, so far as I could feel, it had nothing to support it. I staggered back in amazement. Then I took a tinder-box from my pocket and struck a light. At the first flash a man seemed to be floating in the air in front of me, and I dropped the box in my amazement. Again, with tremulous fingers, I struck the flint against the steel, and this time I lit not only the tinder, but the wax taper. I held it up, and if my amazement was lessened, my horror was increased by that which it revealed.

The man had been nailed to the wall as a weasel is nailed to the door of a barn. Huge spikes had been driven through his hands and his feet. The poor wretch was in his last agony, his head sunk upon his shoulder and his blackened tongue protruded from his lips. He was dying as much from thirst as from his wounds, and these inhuman wretches had placed a beaker of wine upon the table in front of him to add a fresh pang to his tortures. I raised it to his lips. He had still strength enough to swallow, and the light came back a little to his dim eyes.

" Are you a Frenchman ? " he whispered.

" Yes. They have sent me to learn what had befallen you."

" They discovered me. They have killed me for it.

But before I die let me tell you what I know. A little more of that wine, please! Quick! Quick! I am very near the end. My strength is going. Listen to me! The powder is stored in the Mother Superior's room. The wall is pierced, and the end of the train is in Sister Angela's cell, next the chapel. All was ready two days ago. But they discovered a letter, and they tortured me."

"Good Heavens! have you been hanging here for two days?"

"It seems like two years. Comrade, I have served France, have I not? Then do one little service for me. Stab me to the heart, dear friend! I implore you, I entreat you, to put an end to my sufferings."

The man was indeed in a hopeless plight, and the kindest action would have been that for which he begged. And yet I could not in cold blood drive my knife into his body, although I knew how I should have prayed for such a mercy had I been in his place. But a sudden thought crossed my mind. In my pocket I held that which would give an instant and painless death. It was my own safeguard against torture, and yet this poor soul was in very pressing need of it, and he had deserved well of France.

I took out my phial and emptied it into the cup of wine. I was in the act of handing it to him when I heard a sudden clash of arms outside the door. In an instant I put out my light and slipped behind the window-curtains. Next moment the door was flung open, and two Spaniards strode into the room—fierce, swarthy men in the dress of citizens, but with muskets slung over their shoulders. I looked through the chink in the curtains in an agony of fear lest they had come upon my traces, but it was evident that their visit was simply in order to feast their eyes upon my unfortunate compatriot. One of them held the lantern which he carried up in front of the dying man, and both of them burst into a shout of mocking laughter. Then the eyes of the man with the lantern

fell upon the flagon of wine upon the table. He picked it up, held it, with a devilish grin, to the lips of Hubert, and then, as the poor wretch involuntarily inclined his head forward to reach it, snatched it back and took a long gulp himself. At the same instant he uttered a loud cry, clutched wildly at his own throat, and fell stone-dead upon the floor. His comrade stared at him in horror and amazement. Then, overcome by his own superstitious fears, he gave a yell of terror and rushed madly from the room. I heard his feet clattering wildly on the cobble-stones until the sound died away in the distance.

The lantern had been left burning upon the table, and by its light I saw, as I came out from behind my curtain, that the unfortunate Hubert's head had fallen forward upon his chest and that he also was dead. That motion to reach the wine with his lips had been his last. A clock ticked loudly in the house, but otherwise all was absolutely still. On the wall hung the twisted form of the French-man, on the floor lay the motionless body of the Spaniard, all dimly lit by the horn lantern. For the first time in my life a frantic spasm of terror came over me. I had seen ten thousand men in every conceivable degree of mutilation stretched upon the ground, but the sight had never affected me like those two silent figures who were my companions in that shadowy room. I rushed into the street as the Spaniard had done, eager only to leave that house of gloom behind me, and I had run as far as the cathedral before my wits came back to me. There I stopped panting in the shadow, and, my hand pressed to my side, I tried to collect my scattered senses and to plan out what I should do. As I stood there, breathless, the great brass bells roared twice above my head. It was two o'clock. Four was the hour when the storming party would be in its place. I had still two hours in which to act.

The cathedral was brilliantly lit within, and a number of people were passing in and out ; so I entered, thinking that I was less likely to be accosted there and that I might

have quiet to form my plans. It was certainly a singular sight, for the place had been turned into a hospital, a refuge and a storehouse. One aisle was crammed with provisions, another was littered with sick and wounded, while in the centre a great number of helpless people had taken up their abode and had even lit their cooking fires upon the mosaic floors. There were many at prayer, so I knelt in the shadow of a pillar and I prayed with all my heart that I might have the good luck to get out of this scrape alive, and that I might do such a deed that night as would make my name as famous in Spain as it had already become in Germany. I waited until the clock struck three and then I left the cathedral and made my way towards the Convent of the Madonna, where the assault was to be delivered. You will understand, you who know me so well, that I was not the man to return tamely to the French camp with the report that our agent was dead and that other means must be found of entering the city. Either I should find some means to finish his uncompleted task or there would be a vacancy for a senior captain in the Hussars of Conflans.

I passed unquestioned down the broad boulevard, which I have already described, until I came to the great stone convent which formed the outwork of the defence. It was built in a square with a garden in the centre. In this garden some hundreds of men were assembled, all armed and ready, for it was known, of course, within the town that this was the point against which the French attack was likely to be made. Up to this time our fighting all over Europe had always been done between one army and another. It was only here in Spain that we learned how terrible a thing it is to fight against a people. On the one hand there is no glory, for what glory could be gained by defeating this rabble of elderly shopkeepers, ignorant peasants, fanatical priests, excited women and all the other creatures who made up the garrison ? On the other hand there were extreme discomfort and danger, for these people would give you no rest, would observe

no rules of war, and were desperately earnest in their desire by hook or by crook to do you an injury. I began to realise how odious was our task as I looked upon the motley but ferocious groups who were gathered round the watch fires in the garden of the Convent of the Madonna. It was not for us soldiers to think about politics, but from the beginning there always seemed to be a curse upon this war in Spain.

However, at the moment I had no time to brood over such matters as these. There was, as I have said, no difficulty in getting as far as the convent garden, but to pass inside the convent unquestioned was not so easy. The first thing which I did was to walk round the garden, and I was soon able to pick out one large stained-glass window which must belong to the chapel. I had understood from Hubert that the Mother Superior's room in which the powder was stored was near to this, and that the train had been laid through a hole in the wall from some neighbouring cell. I must at all costs get into the convent. There was a guard at the door, and how could I get in without explanations? But a sudden inspiration showed me how the thing might be done. In the garden was a well, and beside the well were a number of empty buckets. I filled two of these and approached the door. The errand of a man who carries a bucket of water in each hand does not need to be explained. The guard opened to let me through. I found myself in a long stone-flagged corridor lit with lanterns, with the cells of the nuns leading out from one side of it. Now at last I was on the high road to success. I walked on without hesitation, for I knew by my observations in the garden which way to go for the chapel.

A number of Spanish soldiers were lounging and smoking in the corridor, several of whom addressed me as I passed. I fancy it was for my blessing that they asked, and my "Ora pro nobis" seemed to entirely satisfy them. Soon I had got as far as the chapel, and it was easy to see that the cell next door was used as a

magazine, for the floor was all black with powder in front of it. The door was shut, and two fierce-looking fellows stood on guard outside it, one of them with a key stuck in his belt. Had we been alone it would not have been long before it would have been in my hand, but with his comrade there it was impossible for me to hope to take it by force. The cell next door to the magazine on the far side from the chapel must be the one which belonged to Sister Angela. It was half open. I took my courage in both hands, and leaving my buckets in the corridor, I walked unchallenged into the room.

I was prepared to find half a dozen fierce Spanish desperadoes within, but what actually met my eyes was even more embarrassing. The room had apparently been set aside for the use of some of the nuns, who for some reason had refused to quit their home. Three of them were within, one an elderly, stern-faced dame who was evidently the Mother Superior, the others young ladies of charming appearance. They were seated together at the far side of the room, but they all rose at my entrance, and I saw with some amazement, by their manner and expressions, that my coming was both welcome and expected. In a moment my presence of mind had returned, and I saw exactly how the matter lay. Naturally, since an attack was about to be made upon the convent, these sisters had been expecting to be directed to some place of safety. Probably they were under vow not to quit the walls, and they had been told to remain in this cell until they had received further orders. In any case I adapted my conduct to this supposition, since it was clear that I must get them out of the room, and this would give me a ready excuse to do so. I first cast a glance at the door and observed that the key was within. I then made a gesture to the nuns to follow me. The Mother Superior asked me some question, but I shook my head impatiently and beckoned to her again. She hesitated, but I stamped my foot and called them forth in so imperious a manner that they came at once. They

would be safer in the chapel, and thither I led them, placing them at the end which was farthest from the magazine. As the three nuns took their places before the altar my heart bounded with joy and pride within me, for I felt that the last obstacle had been lifted from my path.

And yet how often have I not found that this is the very moment of danger? I took a last glance at the Mother Superior and to my dismay I saw that her piercing dark eyes were fixed, with an expression in which surprise was deepening into suspicion, upon my right hand. There were two points which might well have attracted her attention. One was that it was red with the blood of the sentinel whom I had stabbed in the tree. That alone might count for little, as the knife is as familiar as the breviary to the monks of Saragossa. But on my fore-finger I wore a heavy gold ring—the gift of a German baroness whose name I may not mention. It shone brightly in the light of the altar lamp. Now, a ring upon a friar's hand is an impossibility, since they are vowed to absolute poverty. I turned quickly and made for the door of the chapel, but the mischief was done. As I glanced back I saw that the Mother Superior was already hurrying after me. I ran through the chapel door and along the corridor, but she called out some shrill warning to the two guards in front. Fortunately I had the presence of mind to call out also, and to point down the passage as if we were both pursuing the same object, Next instant I had dashed past them, sprang into the cell. slammed the heavy door, and fastened it upon the inside. With a bolt above and below and a huge lock in the centre it was a piece of timber that would take some forcing.

Even now if they had had the wit to put a barrel of powder against the door I should have been ruined. It was their only chance, for I had come to the final stage of my adventure. Here at last, after such a string of dangers as few men have ever lived to talk of I was at one end of the powder train, with the Saragossa magazine at the other. They were howling like wolves out in the passage, and

muskets were crashing against the door. I paid no heed to their clamour, but I looked eagerly round for that train of which Hubert had spoken. Of course, it must be at the side of the room next to the magazine. I crawled along it on my hands and knees, looking into every crevice, but no sign could I see. Two bullets flew through the door and flattened themselves against the wall. The thudding and smashing grew ever louder. I saw a grey pile in a corner, flew to it with a cry of joy, and found that it was only dust. Then I got back to the side of the door where no bullets could ever reach me—they were streaming freely into the room—and I tried to forget this fiendish howling in my ear and to think out where this train could be. It must have been carefully laid by Hubert lest these nuns should see it. I tried to imagine how I should myself have arranged it had I been in his place. My eye was attracted by a statue of St. Joseph which stood in the corner. There was a wreath of leaves along the edge of the pedestal, with a lamp burning amidst them. I rushed across to it and tore the leaves aside. Yes, yes, there was a thin black line, which disappeared through a small hole in the wall. I tilted over the lamp, and threw myself on the ground. Next instant came a roar like thunder, the walls wavered and tottered around me, the ceiling clattered down from above and over the yell of the terrified Spaniards was heard the terrific shout of the storming column of the Grenadiers. As in a dream—a happy dream—I heard it, and then I heard no more.

When I came to my senses two French soldiers were propping me up, and my head was singing like a kettle. I staggered to my feet and looked around me. The plaster had fallen, the furniture was scattered, and there were rents in the bricks, but no signs of a breach. In fact, the walls of the convent had been so solid that the explosion of the magazine had been insufficient to throw them down. On the other hand, it had caused such a

panic among the defenders that our stormers had been able to carry the windows and throw open the doors almost without resistance. As I ran out into the corridor I found it full of troops, and I met Marshal Lannes himself, who was entering with his staff. He stopped and listened eagerly to my story.

"Splendid, Captain Gerard, splendid!" he cried. "These facts will certainly be reported to the Emperor."

"I would suggest to your excellency," said I, "that I have only finished the work that was planned and carried out by Monsieur Hubert, who gave his life for the cause."

"His services will not be forgotten," said the Marshal. "Meanwhile, Captain Gerard, it is half-past four, and you must be starving after such a night of exertion. My staff and I will breakfast inside the city. I assure you that you will be an honoured guest."

"I will follow your excellency," said I. "There is a small engagement which detains me."

He opened his eyes.

"At this hour?"

"Yes, sir," I answered. "My fellow-officers, whom I never saw until last night, will not be content unless they catch another glimpse of me the first thing this morning."

"*Au revoir*, then," said Marshal Lannes, as he passed upon his way.

I hurried through the shattered door of the convent. When I reached the roofless house in which we had held the consultation the night before, I threw off my gown, and I put on the busby and sabre which I had left there. Then, a hussar once more, I hurried onwards to the grove which was our rendezvous. My brain was still reeling from the concussion of the powder, and I was exhausted by the many emotions which had shaken me during that terrible night. It is like a dream, all that walk in the first dim grey light of dawn, with the smouldering camp-fires around me and the buzz of the waking

army. Bugles and drums in every direction were mustering the infantry, for the explosion and the shouting had told their own tale. I strode onwards until, as I entered the little clump of cork oaks behind the horse lines, I saw my twelve comrades waiting in a group, their sabres at their sides. They looked at me curiously as I approached. Perhaps with my powder-blackened face and my blood-stained hands I seemed a different Gerard to the young captain whom they had made game of the night before.

"Good morning, gentlemen," said I. "I regret exceedingly if I have kept you waiting, but I have not been master of my own time."

They said nothing, but they still scanned me with curious eyes. I can see them now, standing in a line before me, tall men and short men, stout men and thin men; Olivier, with his warlike moustache; the thin, eager face of Pelletan; young Oudin, flushed by his first duel; Mortier, with the sword-cut across his wrinkled brow. I laid aside my busby and drew my sword.

"I have one favour to ask you, gentlemen," said I. "Marshal Lannes has invited me to breakfast, and I cannot keep him waiting."

"What do you suggest?" asked Major Olivier.

"That you release me from my promise to give you five minutes each, and that you will permit me to attack you all together." I stood upon my guard as I spoke.

But their answer was truly beautiful and truly French. With one impulse the twelve swords flew from their scabbards and were raised in salute. There they stood, the twelve of them, motionless, their heels together, each with his sword upright before his face.

I staggered back from them. I looked from one to the other. For an instant I could not believe my own eyes. They were paying me homage, these, the men who had jeered me! Then I understood it all. I saw the effect

that I had made upon them and their desire to make reparation. When a man is weak he can steel himself against danger, but not against emotion. "Comrades," I cried, "comrades——!" but I could say no more. Something seemed to take me by the throat and choke me. And then in an instant Olivier's arms were round me, Pelletan had seized me by the right hand, Mortier by the left, some were patting me on the shoulder, some were clapping me on the back, on every side smiling faces were looking into mine; and so it was that I knew that I had won my footing in the Hussars of Conflans.

3. *How the Brigadier slew the Fox*

IN all the great hosts of France there was only one officer towards whom the English of Wellington's army retained a deep, steady and unchangeable hatred. There were plunderers among the French, and men of violence, gamblers, duellists and *roués*. All these could be forgiven, for others of their kidney were to be found among the ranks of the English. But one officer of Massena's force had committed a crime which was unspeakable, unheard of, abominable; only to be alluded to with curses late in the evening, when a second bottle had loosened the tongues of men. The news of it was carried back to England, and country gentlemen who knew little of the details of the war grew crimson with passion when they heard of it, and yeomen of the shires raised freckled fists to Heaven and swore. And yet who should be the doer of this dreadful deed but our friend the brigadier, Étienne Gerard, of the Hussars of Conflans, gay-riding, plume-tossing, debonair, the darling of the ladies and of the six brigades of light cavalry.

But the strange part of it is that this gallant gentleman did this hateful thing, and made himself the most unpopular man in the Peninsula, without ever knowing that he had done a crime for which there is hardly a name

amid all the resources of our language. He died of old age, and never once in that imperturbable self-confidence which adorned or disfigured his character knew that so many thousand Englishmen would gladly have hanged him with their own hands. On the contrary, he numbered this adventure among those other exploits which he has given to the world, and many a time he chuckled and hugged himself as he narrated it to the eager circle who gathered round him in that humble café where, between his dinner and his dominoes, he would tell, amid tears and laughter, of that inconceivable Napoleonic past when France, like an angel of wrath, rose up, splendid and terrible, before a cowering continent. Let us listen to him as he tells the story in his own way and from his own point of view.

You must know, my friends (said he), that it was towards the end of the year eighteen hundred and ten that I and Massena and the others pushed Wellington backwards until we had hoped to drive him and his army into the Tagus. But when we were still twenty-five miles from Lisbon we found that we were betrayed, for what had this Englishman done but build an enormous line of works and forts at a place called Torres Vedras, so that even we were unable to get through them! They lay across the whole peninsula, and our army was so far from home that we did not dare to risk a reverse, and we had already learned at Busaco that it was no child's play to fight against these people. What could we do, then, but sit down in front of these lines and blockade them to the best of our power? There we remained for six months, amid such anxieties that Massena said afterwards that he had not one hair which was not white upon his body. For my own part, I did not worry much about our situation, but I looked after our horses, who were in great need of rest and green fodder. For the rest, we drank the wine of the country and passed the time as best we might. There was a lady at Santarem—but my lips are sealed.

It is the part of a gallant man to say nothing, though he may indicate that he could say a great deal.

One day Massena sent for me, and I found him in his tent with a great plan pinned upon the table. He looked at me in silence with that single piercing eye of his, and I felt by his expression that the matter was serious. He was nervous and ill at ease, but my bearing seemed to reassure him. It is good to be in contact with brave men.

"Colonel Étienne Gerard," said he, "I have always heard that you are a very gallant and enterprising officer."

It was not for me to confirm such a report, and yet it would be folly to deny it, so I clinked my spurs together and saluted.

"You are also an excellent rider."

I admitted it.

"And the best swordsman in the six brigades of light cavalry."

Massena was famous for the accuracy of his information.

"Now," said he, "if you will look at this plan you will have no difficulty in understanding what it is that I wish you to do. These are the lines of Torres Vedras. You will perceive that they cover a vast space, and you will realise that the English can only hold a position here and there. Once through the lines, you have twenty-five miles of open country which lie between them and Lisbon. It is very important to me to learn how Wellington's troops are distributed throughout that space, and it is my wish that you should go and ascertain."

His words turned me cold.

"Sir," said I, "it is impossible that a colonel of light cavalry should condescend to act as a spy."

He laughed and clapped me on the shoulder. "You would not be a Hussar if you were not a hot-head," said he. "If you will listen you will understand that I have

not asked you to act as a spy. What do you think of that horse ? "

He had conducted me to the opening of his tent, and there was a chasseur who led up and down a most admirable creature. He was a dapple grey, not very tall—a little over fifteen hands perhaps—but with the short head and splendid arch of the neck which comes with the Arab blood. His shoulders and haunches were so muscular, and yet his legs so fine, that it thrilled me with joy just to gaze upon him. A fine horse or a beautiful woman, I cannot look at them unmoved, even now when seventy winters have chilled my blood. You can think how it was in the year '10.

" This," said Massena, " is Voltigeur, the swiftest horse in our army. What I desire is that you should start to-night, ride round the lines upon the flank, make your way across the enemy's rear, and return upon the other flank, bringing me news of his dispositions. You will wear a uniform, and will, therefore, if captured, be safe from the death of a spy. It is probable that you will get through the lines unchallenged, for the posts are very scattered. Once through, in daylight you can outride anything which you meet, and if you keep off the roads you may escape entirely unnoticed. If you have not reported yourself by to-morrow night I will understand that you are taken, and I will offer them Colonel Petrie in exchange."

Ah, how my heart swelled with pride and joy as I sprang into the saddle and galloped this grand horse up and down to show the marshal the mastery which I had of him ! He was magnificent—we were both magnificent, for Massena clapped his hands and cried out in his delight. It was not I, but he, who said that a gallant beast deserves a gallant rider. Then, when for the third time, with my panache flying and my dolman streaming behind me, I thundered past him, I saw upon his hard old face that he had no longer any doubt that he had chosen the man for his purpose. I drew my sabre, raised the hilt to

my lips in salute, and galloped on to my own quarters. Already the news had spread that I had been chosen for a mission, and my little rascals came swarming out of their tents to cheer me. Ah! it brings the tears to my old eyes when I think how proud they were of their colonel. And I was proud of them also. They deserved a dashing leader.

The night promised to be a stormy one, which was very much to my liking. It was my desire to keep my departure most secret, for it was evident that if the English heard that I had been detached from the army they would naturally conclude that something important was about to happen. My horse was taken, therefore, beyond the picket line, as if for watering, and I followed and mounted him there. I had a map, a compass and a paper of instructions from the marshal, and with these in the bosom of my tunic, and a sabre at my side, I set out upon my adventure. A thin rain was falling, and there was no moon, so you may imagine that it was not very cheerful. But my heart was light at the thought of the honour which had been done me, and the glory which awaited me. This exploit should be one more in that brilliant series which was to change my sabre into a bâton. Ah, how we dreamed, we foolish fellows, young, and drunk with success! Could I have foreseen that night as I rode, the chosen man of 60,000, that I should spend my life planting cabbages on a hundred francs a month! Oh, my youth, my hopes, my comrades! But the wheel turns and never stops. Forgive me, my friends, for an old man has his weakness.

My route, then, lay across the face of the high ground of Torres Vedras, then over a streamlet, past a farmhouse which had been burned down and was now only a landmark, then through a forest of young cork oaks, and so to the monastery of San Antonio, which marked the left of the English position. Here I turned south and rode quietly over the downs, for it was at this point that Massena thought that it would be most easy for me to

find my way unobserved through the position. I went very slowly, for it was so dark that I could not see my hand in front of me. In such cases I leave my bridle loose, and let my horse pick its own way. Voltigeur went confidently forward, and I was very content to sit upon his back, and to peer about me, avoiding every light. For three hours we advanced in this cautious way, until it seemed to me that I must have left all danger behind me. I then pushed on more briskly, for I wished to be in the rear of the whole army by daybreak. There are many vineyards in these parts which in winter become open plains, and a horseman finds few difficulties in his way.

But Massena had underrated the cunning of these English, for it appears that there was not one line of defence, but three, and it was the third which was the most formidable, through which I was at that instant passing. As I rode, elated at my own success, a lantern flashed suddenly before me, and I saw the glint of polished gun-barrels and the gleam of a red coat.

"Who goes there?" cried a voice—such a voice! I swerved to the right and rode like a madman, but a dozen quirts of fire came out of the darkness, and the bullets whizzed all round my ears. That was no new sound to me, my friends, though I will not talk like a foolish conscript and say that I have ever liked it. But at least it had never kept me from thinking clearly, and so I knew that there was nothing for it but to gallop hard and try my luck elsewhere. I rode round the English picket, and then, as I heard nothing more of them, I concluded rightly that I had at last come through their defences. For five miles I rode south, striking a tinder from time to time to look at my pocket compass. And then in an instant—I feel the pang once more as my memory brings back the moment—my horse, without a sob or stagger, fell stone dead beneath me!

I had not known it, but one of the bullets from that infernal picket had passed through his body. The

gallant creature had never winced nor weakened, but had gone while life was in him. One instant I was secure on the swiftest, most graceful horse in Massena's army. The next he lay upon his side, worth only the price of his hide, and I stood there that most helpless, most ungainly of creatures, a dismounted hussar. What could I do with my boots, my spurs, my trailing sabre? I was far inside the enemy's lines. How could I hope to get back again? I am not ashamed to say that I, Étienne Gerard, sat upon my dead horse and sank my face in my hands in my despair. Already the first streaks were whitening in the east. In half an hour it would be light. That I should have won my way past every obstacle, and then at this last instant be left at the mercy of my enemies, my mission ruined, and myself a prisoner—was it not enough to break a soldier's heart?

But courage, my friends! We have these moments of weakness, the bravest of us; but I have a spirit like a slip of steel, for the more you bend it the higher it springs. One spasm of despair, and then a brain of ice and a heart of fire. All was not yet lost. I, who had come through so many hazards, would come through this one also. I rose from my horse and considered what had best be done.

And first of all it was certain that I could not get back. Long before I could pass the lines it would be broad daylight. I must hide myself for the day, and devote the next night to my escape. I took the saddle, holsters and bridle from my poor Voltigeur, and I concealed them among some bushes, so that no one finding him could know that he was a French horse. Then, leaving him lying there, I wandered on in search of some place where I might be safe for the day. In every direction I could see camp fires upon the sides of the hills, and already figures had begun to move around them. I must hide quickly or I was lost. But where was I to hide? It was a vineyard in which I found myself, the poles of the vines still standing, but the plants gone. There was no cover there. Besides, I should want some food and water before

another night had come. I hurried wildly onwards through the waning darkness, trusting that chance would be my friend. And I was not disappointed. Chance is a woman, my friend, and she has her eye always upon a gallant hussar.

Well, then, I stumbled through the vineyard, something loomed in front of me, and I came upon a great square house with another long, low building upon one side of it. Three roads met there, and it was easy to see that this was the *posada*, or wine-shop. There was no light in the windows, and everything was dark and silent, but, of course, I knew that such comfortable quarters were certainly occupied, and probably by someone of importance. I have learned, however, that the nearer the danger may really be the safer the place, and so I was by no means inclined to trust myself away from this shelter. The low building was evidently the stable, and into this I crept, for the door was unlatched. The place was full of bullocks and sheep, gathered there, no doubt, to be out of the clutches of marauders. A ladder led to a loft, and up this I climbed, and concealed myself very snugly among some bales of hay upon the top. This loft had a small open window, and I was able to look down upon the front of the inn and also upon the road Then I crouched and waited to see what would happen.

It was soon evident that I had not been mistaken when I had thought that this might be the quarters of some person of importance. Shortly after daybreak an English light dragoon arrived with a despatch, and from then onwards the place was in a turmoil, officers continually riding up and away. Always the same name was upon their lips: "Sir Stapleton—Sir Stapleton." It was hard for me to lie there with a dry moustache and watch the great flagons which were brought out by the landlord to these English officers. But it amused me to look at their fresh-coloured, clean-shaven, careless faces, and to wonder what they would think if they knew that so celebrated a person was lying so near to them. And then,

as I lay and watched, I saw a sight which filled me with surprise.

It is incredible, the insolence of these English ! What do you suppose Milord Wellington had done when he found that Massena had blockaded him and that he could not move his army ? I might give you many guesses. You might say that he had raged, that he had despaired, that he had brought his troops together and spoken to them about glory and the fatherland before leading them to one last battle. No, Milord did none of these things. But he sent a fleet ship to England to bring him a number of fox-dogs, and he with his officers settled themself down to chase the fox. It is true what I tell you. Behind the lines of Torres Vedras these mad Englishmen made the fox-chase three days in the week. We had heard of it in the camp, and now I myself was to see that it was true.

For, along the road which I have described, there came these very dogs, thirty or forty of them, white and brown, each with its tail at the same angle, like the bayonets of the Old Guard. My faith, but it was a pretty sight ! And behind and amidst them there rode three men with peaked caps and red coats, whom I understood to be the hunters. After them came many horsemen with uniforms of various kinds, stringing along the road in twos and threes, talking together and laughing. They did not seem to be going above a trot, and it appeared to me that it must indeed be a slow fox which they hoped to catch. However, it was their affair, not mine, and soon they had all passed my window and were out of sight. I waited and I watched, ready for any chance which might offer.

Presently an officer, in a blue uniform not unlike that of our flying artillery, came cantering down the road—an elderly, stout man he was, with grey side-whiskers. He stopped and began to talk with an orderly officer of dragoons, who waited outside the inn, and it was then that I learned the advantage of the English which had

been taught me. I could hear and understand all that was said.

"Where is the meet?" said the officer, and I thought that he was hungering for his bifstek. But the other answered him that it was near Altara, so I saw that it was a place of which he spoke.

"You are late, Sir George," said the orderly.

"Yes, I had a court-martial. Has Sir Stapleton Cotton gone?"

At this moment a window opened, and a handsome young man in a very splendid uniform looked out of it.

"Halloa, Murray!" said he. "These cursed papers keep me, but I will be at your heels."

"Very good, Cotton. I am late already, so I will ride on."

"You might order my groom to bring round my horse," said the young general at the window to the orderly below, while the other went on down the road.

The orderly rode away to some outlying stable, and then in a few minutes there came a smart English groom with a cockade in his hat, leading by the bridle a horse—and, oh, my friends, you have never known the perfection to which a horse can attain until you have seen a first-class English hunter. He was superb: tall, broad, strong, and yet as graceful and agile as a deer. Coal black he was in colour, and his neck, and his shoulder, and his quarters, and his fetlocks—how can I describe him all to you? The sun shone upon him as on polished ebony, and he raised his hoofs in a little playful dance so lightly and prettily, while he tossed his mane and whinnied with impatience. Never have I seen such a mixture of strength and beauty and grace. I had often wondered how the English Hussars had managed to ride over the Chasseurs of the Guards in the affair at Astorga, but I wondered no longer when I saw the English horses.

There was a ring for fastening bridles at the door of the inn, and the groom tied the horse there while he entered the house. In an instant I had seen the chance which

Fate had brought to me. Were I in that saddle I should be better off than when I started. Even Voltigeur could not compare with this magnificent creature. To think is to act with me. In one instant I was down the ladder and at the door of the stable. The next I was out and the bridle was in my hand. I bounded into the saddle. Somebody, the master or the man, shouted wildly behind me. What cared I for his shouts! I touched the horse with my spurs, and he bounded forward with such a spring that only a rider like myself could have sat him. I gave him his head and let him go—it did not matter to me where, so long as we left this inn far behind us. He thundered away across the vineyards, and in a very few minutes I had placed miles between myself and my pursuers. They could no longer tell, in that wild country, in which direction I had gone. I knew that I was safe, and, so riding to the top of a small hill, I drew my pencil and note-book from my pocket, and proceeded to make plans of those camps which I could see, and to draw the outline of the country.

He was a dear creature upon whom I sat, but it was not easy to draw upon his back, for every now and then his two ears would cock, and he would start and quiver with impatience. At first I could not understand this trick of his, but soon I observed that he only did it when a peculiar noise—"Yoy, yoy, yoy"—came from somewhere among the oak woods beneath us. And then suddenly this strange cry changed into a most terrible screaming, with the frantic blowing of a horn. Instantly he went mad—this horse. His eyes blazed. His mane bristled. He bounded from the earth and bounded again, twisting and turning in a frenzy. My pencil flew one way and my note-book another. And then, as I looked down into the valley, an extraordinary sight met my eyes. The hunt was streaming down it. The fox I could not see, but the dogs were in full cry, their noses down, their tails up, so close together that they might have been one great yellow and white moving carpet.

And behind them rode the horsemen—my faith, what a sight! Consider every type which a great army could show; some in hunting dress, but the most in uniforms; blue dragoons, red dragoons, red-trousered hussars, green riflemen, artillerymen, gold-slashed lancers, and most of all red, red, red, for the infantry officers ride as hard as the cavalry. Such a crowd, some well mounted, some ill, but all flying along as best they might, the subaltern as good as the general, jostling and pushing, spurring and driving, with every thought thrown to the winds save that they should have the blood of this absurd fox! Truly, they are an extraordinary people, the English! But I had little time to watch the hunt or to marvel at these islanders, for of all these mad creatures the very horse upon which I sat was the maddest. You understand that he was himself a hunter, and that the crying of these dogs was to him what the call of a cavalry trumpet in the street yonder would be to me. It thrilled him. It drove him wild. Again and again he bounded into the air, and then, seizing the bit between his teeth, he plunged down the slope, and galloped after the dogs. I swore, and tugged, and pulled, but I was powerless. This English general rode his horse with a snaffle only, and the beast had a mouth of iron. It was useless to pull him back. One might as well try to keep a grenadier from a wine bottle. I gave it up in despair, and, settling down in the saddle, I prepared for the worst which could befall.

What a creature he was! Never have I felt such a horse between my knees. His great haunches gathered under him with every stride, and he shot forward ever faster and faster, stretched like a greyhound, while the wind beat in my face and whistled past my ears. I was wearing our undress jacket, a uniform simple and dark in itself—though some figures give distinction to any uniform—and I had taken the precaution to remove the long panache from my busby. The result was that, amidst the mixture of costumes in the hunt, there was

no reason why mine should attract attention, or why these men, whose thoughts were all with the chase, should give any heed to me. The idea that a French officer might be riding with them was too absurd to enter their minds. I laughed as I rode, for, indeed, amid all the danger, there was something of comic in the situation.

I have said that the hunters were very unequally mounted, and so, at the end of a few miles, instead of being one body of men, like a charging regiment, they were scattered over a considerable space, the better riders well up to the dogs, and the others trailing away behind. Now, I was as good a rider as any, and my horse was the best of them all, and so you can imagine that it was not long before he carried me to the front. And when I saw the dogs streaming over the open, and the red-coated huntsman behind them, and only seven or eight horsemen between us, then it was that the strangest thing of all happened, for I, too, went mad—I, Étienne Gerard! In a moment it came upon me, this spirit of sport, this desire to excel, this hatred of the fox. Accursed animal, should he then defy us? Vile robber, his hour was come! Ah, it is a great feeling, this feeling of sport, my friends, this desire to trample the fox under the hoofs of your horse. I have made the fox-chase with the English. I have also, as I may tell you some day, fought the box-fight with the Bustler, of Bristol. And I say to you that this sport is a wonderful thing—full of interest as well as madness.

The farther we went the faster galloped my horse, and soon there were but three men as near the dogs as I was. All thought of fear of discovery had vanished. My brain throbbed, my blood ran hot—only one thing upon earth seemed worth living for, and that was to overtake this infernal fox. I passed one of the horsemen—a hussar like myself. There were only two in front of me now—the one in a black coat, the other the blue artilleryman whom I had seen at the inn. His grey whiskers streamed in the wind, but he rode magnificently. For a mile or

more we kept in this order, and then, as we galloped up a steep slope, my lighter weight brought me to the front. I passed them both, and when I reached the crown I was riding level with the little, hard-faced English huntsman. In front of us were the dogs, and then, a hundred paces beyond them, was a brown wisp of a thing, the fox itself, stretched to the uttermost. The sight of him fired my blood. "Aha, we have you then, assassin!" I cried, and shouted my encouragement to the huntsman. I waved my hand to show him that there was one upon whom he could rely.

And now there were only the dogs between me and my prey. These dogs, whose duty it is to point out the game, were now rather a hindrance than a help to us, for it was hard to know how to pass them. The huntsman felt the difficulty as much as I, for he rode behind them and could make no progress towards the fox. He was a swift rider, but wanting in enterprise. For my part, I felt that it would be unworthy of the Hussars of Conflans if I could not overcome such a difficulty as this. Was Étienne Gerard to be stopped by a herd of fox-dogs? It was absurd. I gave a shout and spurred my horse.

"Hold hard, sir! Hold hard!" cried the huntsman.

He was uneasy for me, this good old man, but I re-assured him by a wave and smile. The dogs opened in front of me. One or two may have been hurt, but what would you have? The egg must be broken for the omelette. I could hear the huntsman shouting his con-gratulations behind me. One more effort, and the dogs were all behind me. Only the fox was in front.

Ah, the joy and pride of that moment! To know that I had beaten the English at their own sport. Here were three hundred all thirsting for the life of this animal, and yet it was I who was about to take it. I thought of my comrades of the light cavalry brigade, of my mother, of the Emperor, of France. I had brought honour to each and all. Every instant brought me nearer to the fox. The moment for action had arrived, so I unsheathed my sabre.

I waved it in the air, and the brave English all shouted behind me.

Only then did I understand how difficult is this fox-chase, for one may cut again and again at the creature and never strike him once. He is small, and turns quickly from a blow. At every cut I heard those shouts of encouragement behind me, and they spurred me to yet another effort. And then at last the supreme moment of my triumph arrived. In the very act of turning I caught him fair with such another back-handed cut as that with which I killed the aide-de-camp of the Emperor of Russia. He flew into two pieces, his head one way and his tail another. I looked back and waved the blood-stained sabre in the air. For the moment I was exalted —superb !

Ah ! how I should have loved to have waited to have received the congratulations of these generous enemies. There were fifty of them in sight, and not one of them who was not waving his hand and shouting. They are not really such a phlegmatic race, the English. A gallant deed in war or in sport will always warm their hearts. As to the old huntsman, he was the nearest to me, and I could see with my own eyes how overcome he was by what he had seen. He was like a man paralysed—his mouth open, his hand, with outspread fingers, raised in the air. For a moment my inclination was to return and embrace him. But already the call of duty was sounding in my ears, and these English, in spite of all the fraternity which exists among sportsmen, would certainly have made me prisoner. There was no hope for my mission now, and I had done all that I could do. I could see the lines of Massena's camp no very great distance off, for, by a lucky chance, the chase had taken us in that direction. I turned from the dead fox, saluted with my sabre, and galloped away.

But they would not leave me so easily, these gallant huntsmen. I was the fox now, and the chase swept bravely over the plain. It was only at the moment when

I started for the camp that they could have known that I was a Frenchman, and now the whole swarm of them were at my heels. We were within gunshot of our pickets before they would halt, and then they stood in knots and would not go away, but shouted and waved their hands at me. No, I will not think that it was in enmity. Rather would I fancy that a glow of admiration filled their breasts, and that their one desire was to embrace the stranger who had carried himself so gallantly and well.

4. *How the Brigadier saved an Army*

I HAVE told you, my friends, how we held the English shut up for six months, from October, 1810, to March, 1811, within their lines of Torres Vedras. It was during this time that I hunted the fox in their company, and showed them that amidst all their sportsmen there was not one who could outride a Hussar of Conflans. When I galloped back into the French lines with the blood of the creature still moist upon my blade, the outposts who had seen what I had done raised a frenzied cry in my honour, whilst these English hunters still yelled behind me, so that I had the applause of both armies. It made the tears rise to my eyes to feel that I had won the admiration of so many brave men. These English are generous foes. That very evening there came a packet under a white flag addressed "To the hussar officer who cut down the fox." Within I found the fox itself in two pieces, as I had left it. There was a note also, short but hearty as the English fashion is, to say that as I had slaughtered the fox it only remained for me to eat it. They could not know that it was not our French custom to eat foxes, and it showed their desire that he who had won the honours of the chase should also partake of the game. It is not for a Frenchman to be outdone in politeness, and so I returned it to these brave

hunters, and begged them to accept it as a side-dish for their next *déjeuner de la chasse*. It is thus that chivalrous opponents make war.

I had brought back with me from my ride a clear plan of the English lines, and this I laid before Massena that very evening.

I had hoped that it would lead him to attack, but all the marshals were at each other's throats, snapping and growling like so many hungry hounds. Ney hated Massena, and Massena hated Junot, and Soult hated them all. For this reason nothing was done. In the meantime food grew more and more scarce, and our beautiful cavalry was ruined for want of fodder. With the end of the winter we had swept the whole country bare, and nothing remained for us to eat, although we sent our forage parties far and wide. It was clear even to the bravest of us that the time had come to retreat. I was myself forced to admit it.

But retreat was not so easy. Not only were the troops weak and exhausted from want of supplies, but the enemy had been much encouraged by our long inaction. Of Wellington we had no great fear. We had found him to be brave and cautious, but with little enterprise. Besides, in that barren country his pursuit could not be rapid. But on our flanks and in our rear there had gathered great numbers of Portuguese militia, of armed peasants, and of guerillas. These people had kept a safe distance all the winter, but now that our horses were foundered they were as thick as flies all round our outposts, and no man's life was worth a sou when once he fell into their hands. I could name a dozen officers of my own acquaintance who were cut off during that time, and the luckiest was he who received a ball from behind a rock through his head or his heart. There were some whose deaths were so terrible that no report of them was ever allowed to reach their relatives. So frequent were these tragedies, and so much did they impress the imagination of the men, that it became very difficult to induce them to leave the

camp. There was one especial scoundrel, a guerilla chief named Manuelo, "The Smiler," whose exploits filled our men with horror. He was a large, fat man of jovial aspect, and he lurked with a fierce gang among the mountains which lay upon our left flank. A volume might be written of this fellow's cruelties and brutalities, but he was certainly a man of power, for he organised his brigands in a manner which made it almost impossible for us to get through his country. This he did by imposing a severe discipline upon them and enforcing it by cruel penalties, a policy by which he made them formidable, but which had some unexpected results, as I will show you in my story. Had he not flogged his own lieutenant—— But you will hear of that when the time comes.

There were many difficulties in connection with a retreat, but it was very evident that there was no other possible course, and so Massena began to quickly pass his baggage and his sick from Torres Novas, which was his headquarters, to Coimbra, the first strong post on his line of communications. He could not do this unperceived, however, and at once the guerillas came swarming closer and closer upon our flanks. One of our divisions, that of Clausel, with a brigade of Montbrun's cavalry, was far to the south of the Tagus, and it became very necessary to let them know that we were about to retreat, for otherwise they would be left unsupported in the very heart of the enemy's country. I remember wondering how Massena would accomplish this, for simple couriers could not get through, and small parties would be certainly destroyed. In some way an order to fall back must be conveyed to these men, or France would be the weaker by fourteen thousand men. Little did I think that it was I, Colonel Gerard, who was to have the honour of a deed which might have formed the crowning glory of any other man's life, and which stands high among those exploits which have made my own so famous.

At that time I was serving on Massena's staff, and he

had two other aides-de-camp, who were also very brave and intelligent officers. The name of one was Cortex and of the other Duplessis. They were senior to me in age, but junior in every other respect. Cortex was a small, dark man, very quick and eager. He was a fine soldier, but he was ruined by his conceit. To take him at his own valuation, he was the first man in the army. Duplessis was a Gascon, like myself, and he was a very fine fellow, as all Gascon gentlemen are. We took it in turn, day about, to do duty, and it was Cortex who was in attendance upon the morning of which I speak. I saw him at breakfast, but afterwards neither he nor his horse was to be seen. All day Massena was in his usual gloom, and he spent much of his time staring with his telescope at the English lines and at the shipping in the Tagus. He said nothing of the mission upon which he had sent our comrade, and it was not for us to ask him any questions.

That night, about twelve o'clock, I was standing outside the Marshal's headquarters when he came out and stood motionless for half an hour, his arms folded upon his breast, staring through the darkness towards the east. So rigid and intent was he that you might have believed the muffled figure and the cocked hat to have been the statue of the man. What he was looking for I could not imagine ; but at last he gave a bitter curse, and, turning on his heel, he went back into the house, banging the door behind him.

Next day the second aide-de-camp, Duplessis, had an interview with Massena in the morning, after which neither he nor his horse was seen again. That night, as I sat in the ante-room, the Marshal passed me, and I observed him through the window standing and staring to the east exactly as he had done before. For fully half an hour he remained there, a black shadow in the gloom. Then he strode in, the door banged, and I heard his spurs and his scabbard jingling and clanking through the passage. At the best he was a savage old man, but when

he was crossed I had almost as soon face the Emperor himself. I heard him that night cursing and stamping above my head, but he did not send for me, and I knew him too well to go unsought.

Next morning it was my turn, for I was the only aide-de-camp left. I was his favourite aide-de-camp. His heart went out always to a smart soldier. I declare that I think there were tears in his black eyes when he sent for me that morning.

"Gerard!" said he. "Come here!"

With a friendly gesture he took me by the sleeve and he led me to the open window which faced the east. Beneath us was the infantry camp, and beyond that the lines of the cavalry with the long rows of picketed horses. We could see the French outposts, and then a stretch of open country, intersected by vineyards. A range of hills lay beyond, with one well-marked peak towering above them. Round the base of these hills was a broad belt of forest. A single road ran white and clear, dipping and rising until it passed through a gap in the hills.

"This," said Massena, pointing to the mountain, "is the Sierra de Merodal. Do you perceive anything upon the top?"

I answered that I did not.

"Now?" he asked, and he handed me his field-glass.

With its aid I perceived a small mound or cairn upon the crest.

"What you see," said the Marshal, "is a pile of logs which was placed there as a beacon. We laid it when the country was in our hands, and now, although we no longer hold it, the beacon remains undisturbed. Gerard, that beacon must be lit to-night. France needs it, the Emperor needs it, the army needs it. Two of your comrades have gone to light it, but neither has made his way to the summit. To-day it is your turn, and I pray that you may have better luck."

It is not for a soldier to ask the reason for his orders,

and so I was about to hurry from the room, but the Marshal laid his hand upon my shoulder and held me.

" You shall know all, and so learn how high is the cause for which you risk your life," said he. " Fifty miles to the south of us, on the other side of the Tagus, is the army of General Clausel. His camp is situated near a peak named the Sierra d'Ossa. On the summit of this peak is a beacon, and by this beacon he has a picket. It is agreed between us that when at midnight he shall see our signal fire he shall light his own as an answer, and shall then at once fall back upon the main army. If he does not start at once I must go without him. For two days I have endeavoured to send him his message. It must reach him to-day, or his army will be left behind and destroyed."

Ah, my friends, how my heart swelled when I heard how high was the task which Fortune had assigned to me ! If my life were spared, here was one more splendid new leaf for my laurel crown. If, on the other hand, I died, then it would be a death worthy of such a career. I said nothing, but I cannot doubt that all the noble thoughts that were in me shone in my face, for Massena took my hand and wrung it.

" There is the hill and there the beacon," said he. " There is only this guerilla and his men between you and it. I cannot detach a large party for the enterprise, and a small one would be seen and destroyed. Therefore to you alone I commit it. Carry it out in your own way, but at twelve oclock this night let me see the fire upon the hill."

" If it is not there," said I, " then I pray you, Marshal Massena, to see that my effects are sold and the money sent to my mother." So I raised my hand to my busby and turned upon my heel, my heart glowing at the thought of the great exploit which lay before me.

I sat in my own chamber for some little time considering how I had best take the matter in hand. The fact that neither Cortex nor Duplessis, who were very zealous

and active officers, had succeeded in reaching the summit of the Sierra de Merodal showed that the country was very closely watched by the guerillas. I reckoned out the distance upon a map. There were ten miles of open country to be crossed before reaching the hills. Then came a belt of forest on the lower slopes of the mountain, which may have been three or four miles wide. And then there was the actual peak itself, of no very great height, but without any cover to conceal me. Those were the three stages of my journey.

It seemed to me that once I had reached the shelter of the wood all would be easy, for I could lie concealed within its shadows and climb upwards under the cover of night. From eight till twelve would give me four hours of darkness in which to make the ascent. It was only the first stage, then, which I had seriously to consider.

Over that flat country there lay the inviting white road, and I remembered that my comrades had both taken their horses. That was clearly their ruin, for nothing could be easier than for the brigands to keep watch upon the road, and to lay an ambush for all who passed along it. It would not be difficult for me to ride across country, and I was well horsed at that time, for I had not only Violette and Rataplan, who were two of the finest mounts in the army, but I had the splendid black English hunter which I had taken from Sir Cotton. However, after much thought, I determined to go upon foot, since I should then be in a better state to take advantage of any chance which might offer. As to my dress, I covered my hussar uniform with a long cloak, and I put a grey forage cap upon my head. You may ask me why I did not dress as a peasant, but I answer that a man of honour has no desire to die the death of a spy. It is one thing to be murdered, and it is another to be justly executed by the laws of war. I would not run the risk of such an end.

In the late afternoon I stole out of the camp and passed through the line of our pickets. Beneath my cloak I had

a field-glass and a pocket pistol, as well as my sword. In my pocket were tinder, flint and steel.

For two or three miles I kept under cover of the vineyards, and made such good progress that my heart was high within me, and I thought to myself that it only needed a man of some brains to take the matter in hand to bring it easily to success. Of course, Cortex and Duplessis galloping down the high road would be easily seen, but the intelligent Gerard lurking among the vines was quite another person. I dare say I had got as far as five miles before I met any check. At that point there is a small winehouse, round which I perceived some carts and a number of people, the first that I had seen. Now that I was well outside the lines I knew that every person was my enemy, so I crouched lower while I stole along to a point from which I could get a better view of what was going on. I then perceived that these people were peasants, who were loading two waggons with empty wine-casks. I failed to see how they could either help or hinder me, so I continued upon my way.

But soon I understood that my task was not so simple as had appeared. As the ground rose the vineyards ceased, and I came upon a stretch of open country studded with low hills. Crouching in a ditch I examined them with a glass, and I very soon perceived that there was a watcher upon every one of them, and that these people had a line of pickets and outposts thrown forward exactly like our own. I had heard of the discipline which was practised by this scoundrel whom they called "The Smiler," and this, no doubt, was an example of it. Between the hills there was a cordon of sentries, and, though I worked some distance round to the flank, I still found myself faced by the enemy. It was a puzzle what to do. There was so little cover that a rat could hardly cross without being seen. Of course, it would be easy enough to slip through at night, as I had done with the English at Torres Vedras; but I was still far from the mountain, and I could not in that case reach it in time to light the

midnight beacon. I lay in my ditch and I made a thousand plans, each more dangerous than the last. And then suddenly I had that flash of light which comes to the brave man who refuses to despair.

You remember I have mentioned that two waggons were loading up with empty casks at the inn. The heads of the oxen were turned to the east, and it was evident that those waggons were going in the direction which I desired. Could I only conceal myself upon one of them, what better and easier way could I find of passing through the lines of the guerillas? So simple and so good was the plan that I could not restrain a cry of delight as it crossed my mind, and I hurried away instantly in the direction of the inn. There, from behind some bushes, I had a good look at what was going on upon the road.

There were three peasants with red montero caps loading the barrels, and they had completed one waggon and the lower tier of the other. A number of empty barrels still lay outside the winehouse waiting to be put on. Fortune was my friend—I have always said that she is a woman and cannot resist a dashing young hussar. As I watched, the three fellows went into the inn, for the day was hot, and they were thirsty after their labour. Quick as a flash I darted out from my hiding-place, climbed on to the waggon, and crept into one of the empty casks. It had a bottom but no top, and it lay upon its side with the open end inwards. There I crouched like a dog in its kennel, my knees drawn up to my chin; for the barrels were not very large and I am a well-grown man. As I lay there out came the three peasants again, and presently I heard a crash upon the top of me, which told that I had another barrel above me. They piled them upon the cart until I could not imagine how I was ever to get out again. However, it is time to think of crossing the Vistula when you are over the Rhine, and I had no doubt that if chance and my own wits had carried me so far they would carry me farther.

Soon, when the waggon was full, they set forth upon

their way, and I within my barrel chuckled at every step, for it was carrying me whither I wished to go. We travelled slowly, and the peasants walked beside the waggons. This I knew, because I heard their voices close to me. They seemed to me to be very merry fellows, for they laughed heartily as they went. What the joke was I could not understand. Though I speak their language fairly well I could not hear anything comic in the scraps of their conversation which met my ear.

I reckoned that at the rate of walking of a team of oxen we covered about two miles an hour. Therefore, when I was sure that two and a half hours had passed—such hours, my friends, cramped, suffocated and nearly poisoned with the fumes of the lees—when they had passed, I was sure that the dangerous open country was behind us, and that we were upon the edge of the forest and the mountain. So now I had to turn my mind upon how I was to get out of my barrel. I had thought of several ways, and was balancing one against the other, when the question was decided for me in a very simple but unexpected manner.

The waggon stopped suddenly with a jerk, and I heard a number of gruff voices in excited talk. "Where, where?" cried one. "On our cart," said another. "Who is he?" said a third. "A French officer; I saw his cap and his boots." They all roared with laughter. "I was looking out of the window of the *posada* and I saw him spring into the cask like a toreador with a Seville bull at his heels." "Which cask, then?" "It was this one," said the fellow, and, sure enough, his fist struck the wood beside my head.

What a situation, my friends, for a man of my standing! I blush now, after forty years, when I think of it. To be trussed like a fowl and to listen helplessly to the rude laughter of these boors—to know, too, that my mission had come to an ignominious and even ridiculous end. I would have blessed the man who would have sent a bullet through the cask and freed me from my misery.

I heard the crashing of the barrels as they hurled them off the waggon, and then a couple of bearded faces and the muzzles of two guns looked in at me. They seized me by the sleeves of my coat, and they dragged me out into the daylight. A strange figure I must have looked as I stood blinking and gaping in the blinding sunlight. My body was bent like a cripple's, for I could not straighten my stiff joints, and half my coat was as red as an English soldier's from the lees in which I had lain. They laughed and laughed, these dogs, and as I tried to express by my bearing and gestures the contempt in which I held them, their laughter grew all the louder. But even in these hard circumstances I bore myself like the man I am, and as I cast my eye slowly round I did not find that any of the laughers were very ready to face it.

That one glance round was enough to tell me exactly how I was situated. I had been betrayed by these peasants into the hands of an outpost of guerillas. There were eight of them, savage-looking, hairy creatures, with cotton handkerchiefs under their sombreros, and many-buttoned jackets with coloured sashes round the waist. Each had a gun and one or two pistols stuck in his girdle. The leader, a great bearded ruffian, held his gun against my ear while the others searched my pockets, taking from me my overcoat, my pistol, my glass, my sword, and, worst of all, my flint and steel and tinder. Come what might I was ruined, for I had no longer the means of lighting the beacon even if I should reach it.

Eight of them, my friends, with three peasants, and I unarmed! Was Étienne Gerard in despair? Did he lose his wits? Ah, you know me too well; but they did not know me yet, these dogs of brigands. Never have I made so supreme and astounding an effort as at this very instant when all seemed lost. Yet you might guess many times before you would hit upon the device by which I escaped them. Listen and I will tell you.

They had dragged me from the waggon when they searched me, and I stood, still twisted and warped, in

the midst of them. But the stiffness was wearing off, and already my mind was very actively looking out for some method of breaking away. It was a narrow pass in which the brigands had their outposts. It was bounded on the one hand by a steep mountain side. On the other the ground fell away in a very long slope, which ended in a bushy valley many hundreds of feet below. These fellows, you understand, were hardy mountaineers, who could travel either up hill or down very much quicker than I. They wore abarcas, or shoes of skin, tied on like sandals, which gave them a foothold everywhere. A less resolute man would have despaired. But in an instant I saw and used the strange chance which Fortune had placed in my way. On the very edge of the slope was one of the wine-barrels. I moved slowly towards it, and then with a tiger spring I dived into it feet foremost, and with a roll of my body I tipped it over the side of the hill.

Shall I ever forget that dreadful journey—how I bounded and crashed and whizzed down that terrible slope? I had dug in my knees and elbows, bunching my body into a compact bundle so as to steady it; but my head projected from the end, and it was a marvel that I did not dash out my brains. There were long, smooth slopes and then came steeper scarps where the barrel ceased to roll, and sprang into the air like a goat, coming down with a rattle and crash which jarred every bone in my body. How the wind whistled in my ears, and my head turned and turned until I was sick and giddy and nearly senseless! Then, with a swish and a great rasping and crackling of branches, I reached the bushes which I had seen so far below me. Through them I broke my way, down a slope beyond, and deep into another patch of underwood, where striking a sapling my barrel flew to pieces. From amid a heap of staves and hoops I crawled out, my body aching in every inch of it, but my heart singing loudly with joy and my spirit high within me, for I knew how great was the feat which I had accomplished;

and I already seemed to see the beacon blazing on the hill.

A horrible nausea had seized me from the tossing which I had undergone, and I felt as I did upon the ocean when first I experienced those movements of which the English have taken so perfidious an advantage. I had to sit for a few moments with my head upon my hands beside the ruins of my barrel. But there was no time for rest. Already I heard shouts above me which told that my pursuers were descending the hill. I dashed into the thickest part of the underwood, and I ran and ran until I was utterly exhausted. Then I lay panting and listened with all my ears, but no sound came to them. I had shaken off my enemies.

When I had recovered my breath I travelled swiftly on, and waded knee-deep through several brooks, for it came into my head that they might follow me with dogs. On gaining a clear place and looking round me, I found to my delight that in spite of my adventures I had not been much out of my way. Above me towered the peak of Merodal, with its bare and bold summit shooting out of the groves of dwarf oaks which shrouded its flanks. These groves were the continuation of the cover under which I found myself, and it seemed to me that I had nothing to fear now until I reached the other side of the forest. At the same time I knew that every man's hand was against me, that I was unarmed, and that there were many people about me. I saw no one, but several times I heard shrill whistles, and once the sound of a gun in the distance.

It was hard work pushing one's way through the bushes, and so I was glad when I came to the larger trees and found a path which led between them. Of course, I was too wise to walk upon it, but I kept near it and followed its course. I had gone some distance, and had, as I imagined, nearly reached the limit of the wood, when a strange, moaning sound fell upon my ears. At first I thought it was the cry of some animal, but then there

came words, of which I only caught the French exclamation, " Mon Dieu ! " With great caution I advanced in the direction from which the sound proceeded, and this is what I saw.

On a couch of dried leaves there was stretched a man dressed in the same grey uniform which I wore myself. He was evidently horribly wounded, for he held a cloth to his breast which was crimson with his blood. A pool had formed all round his couch, and he lay in a haze of flies, whose buzzing and droning would certainly have called my attention if his groans had not come to my ear. I lay for a moment, fearing some trap, and then, my pity and loyalty rising above all other feelings, I ran forward and knelt by his side. He turned a haggard face upon me, and it was Duplessis, the man who had gone before me. It needed but one glance at his sunken cheeks and glazing eyes to tell me that he was dying.

" Gerard ! " said he ; " Gerard ! "

I could but look my sympathy, but he, though the life was ebbing swiftly out of him, still kept his duty before him, like the gallant gentleman he was.

" The beacon, Gerard ! You will light it ? "

" Have you flint and steel ? "

" It is here."

" Then I will light it to-night."

" I die happy to hear you say so. They shot me, Gerard. But you will tell the Marshal that I did my best."

" And Cortex ? "

" He was less fortunate. He fell into their hands and died horribly. If you see that you cannot get away, Gerard, put a bullet into your own heart. Don't die as Cortex did."

I could see that his breath was failing, and I bent low to catch his words.

" Can you tell me anything which can help me in my task ? " I asked.

" Yes, yes ; De Pombal. He will help you. Trust

De Pombal." With the words his head fell back and he was dead.

"Trust De Pombal. It is good advice." To my amazement a man was standing at the very side of me. So absorbed had I been in my comrade's words and intent on his advice that he had crept up without my observing him. Now I sprang to my feet, and faced him. He was a tall, dark fellow, black-haired, black-eyed, black-bearded, with a long, sad face. In his hand he had a wine bottle and over his shoulder was slung one of the trebucos, or blunderbusses, which these fellows bear. He made no effort to unsling it, and I understood that this was the man to whom my dead friend had commended me.

"Alas, he is gone!" said he, bending over Duplessis. "He fled into the wood after he was shot, but I was fortunate enough to find where he had fallen and to make his last hours more easy. This couch was my making and I had brought this wine to slake his thirst."

"Sir," said I, "in the name of France I thank you. I am but a colonel of light cavalry, but I am Étienne Gerard, and the name stands for something in the French army. May I ask——"

"Yes, sir, I am Aloysius de Pombal, younger brother of the famous nobleman of that name. At present I am the first lieutenant in the band of the guerilla chief who is usually known as Manuelo, 'The Smiler.'"

My word, I clapped my hand to the place where my pistol should have been, but the man only smiled at the gesture.

"I am his first lieutenant, but I am also his deadly enemy," said he. He slipped off his jacket and pulled up his shirt as he spoke. "Look at this!" he cried, and he turned upon me a back which was all scored and lacerated with red and purple weals. "This is what 'The Smiler' has done to me, a man with the noblest blood of Portugal in my veins. What I will do to 'The Smiler' you have still to see."

There was such fury in his eyes and in the grin of his white teeth that I could no longer doubt his truth, with that clotted and oozing back to corroborate his words.

" I have ten men sworn to stand by me," said he. " In a few days I hope to join your army, when I have done my work here. In the meanwhile——" A strange change came over his face, and he suddenly slung his musket to the front : " Hold up your hands, you French hound ! " he yelled. " Up with them, or I blow your head off ! "

You start, my friends ! You stare ! Think, then, how I stared and started at this sudden ending of our talk. There was the black muzzle, and there the dark, angry eyes behind it. What could I do ? I was helpless. I raised my hands in the air. At the same moment voices sounded from all parts of the wood, there were crying and calling and rushing of many feet. A swarm of dreadful figures broke through the green bushes, a dozen hands seized me, and I, poor, luckless, frenzied I, was a prisoner once more. Thank God, there was no pistol which I could have plucked from my belt and snapped at my own head. Had I been armed at that moment I should not be sitting here in this café and telling you these old-world tales.

With grimy, hairy hands clutching me on every side I was led along the pathway through the wood, the villain De Pombal giving directions to my captors. Four of the brigands carried up the dead body of Duplessis. The shadows of evening were already falling when we cleared the forest and came out upon the mountain-side. Up this I was driven until we reached the headquarters of the guerillas, which lay in a cleft close to the summit of the mountain. There was the beacon which had cost me so much, a square stack of wood, immediately above our heads. Below were two or three huts, which had belonged, no doubt, to goatherds, and which were now used to shelter these rascals. Into one of these I was

cast, bound and helpless, and the dead body of my poor comrade was laid beside me.

I was lying there with the one thought still consuming me, how to wait a few hours and to get at that pile of faggots above my head, when the door of my prison opened and a man entered. Had my hands been free I should have flown at his throat, for it was none other than De Pombal. A couple of brigands were at his heels, but he ordered them back and closed the door behind him.

"You villain!" said I.

"Hush!" he cried. "Speak low, for I do not know who may be listening, and my life is at stake. I have some words to say to you, Colonel Gerard; I wish well to you, as I did to your dead companion. As I spoke to you beside his body I saw that we were surrounded, and that your capture was unavoidable. I should have shared your fate had I hesitated. I instantly captured you myself, so as to preserve the confidence of the band. Your own sense will tell you that there was nothing else for me to do. I do not know now whether I can save you, but at least I will try."

This was a new light upon the situation. I told him that I could not tell how far he spoke the truth, but that I would judge him by his actions.

"I ask nothing better," said he. "A word of advice to you! The chief will see you now. Speak him fair, or he will have you sawn between two planks. Contradict nothing he says. Give him such information he wants. It is your only chance. If you can gain time something may come in our favour. Now, I have no more time. Come at once, or suspicion may be awakened." He helped me to rise and then, opening the door, he dragged me out very roughly, and with the aid of the fellows outside he brutally pushed and thrust me to the place where the guerilla chief was seated, with his rude followers gathered round him.

A remarkable man was Manuelo, "The Smiler." He was fat and florid and comfortable, with a big, clean-

shaven face and a bald head, the very model of a kindly father of a family. As I looked at his honest smile I could scarcely believe that this was, indeed, the infamous ruffian whose name was a horror through the English Army as well as our own. It is well known that Trent, who was a British officer, afterwards had the fellow hanged for his brutalities. He sat upon a boulder and he beamed upon me like one who meets an old acquaintance. I observed, however, that one of his men leaned upon a long saw, and the sight was enough to cure me of all delusions.

"Good evening, Colonel Gerard," said he. "We have been highly honoured by General Massena's staff: Major Cortex one day, Colonel Duplessis the next, and now Colonel Gerard. Possible the Marshal himself may be induced to honour us with a visit. You have seen Duplessis, I understand. Cortex you will find nailed to a tree down yonder. It only remains to be decided how we can best dispose of yourself."

It was not a cheering speech; but all the time his fat face was wreathed in smiles, and he lisped out his words in the most mincing and amiable fashion. Now, however, he suddenly leaned forward, and I read a very real intensity in his eyes.

"Colonel Gerard," said he, "I cannot promise you your life, for it is not our custom, but I can give you an easy death or I can give you a terrible one. Which shall it be?"

"What do you wish me to do in exchange?"

"If you would die easy I ask you to give me truthful answers to the questions which I ask."

A sudden thought flashed through my mind.

"You wish to kill me," said I; "it cannot matter to you how I die. If I answer your questions, will you let me choose the manner of my own death?"

"Yes, I will," said he, "so long as it is before midnight to-night."

"Swear it!" I cried.

"The word of a Portuguese gentleman is sufficient," said he.

"Not a word will I say until you have sworn it."

He flushed with anger and his eyes swept round towards the saw. But he understood from my tone that I meant what I said, and that I was not a man to be bullied into submission. He pulled a cross from under his zammara or jacket of black sheepskin.

"I swear it," said he.

Oh, my joy as I heard the words! What an end—what an end for the first swordsman of France! I could have laughed with delight at the thought.

"Now, your questions!" said I.

"You swear in turn to answer them truly?"

"I do, upon the honour of a gentleman and a soldier." It was, as you perceive, a terrible thing that I promised, but what was it compared to what I might gain by compliance?

"This is a very fair and a very interesting bargain," said he, taking a note-book from his pocket. "Would you kindly turn your gaze towards the French camp?"

Following the direction of his gesture, I turned and looked down upon the camp in the plain beneath us. In spite of the fifteen miles one could in that clear atmosphere see every detail with the utmost distinctness. There were the long squares of our tents and our huts, with the cavalry lines and the dark patches which marked the ten batteries of artillery. How sad to think of my magnificent regiment waiting down yonder, and to know that they would never see their colonel again! With one squadron of them I could have swept all these cut-throats off the face of the earth. My eager eyes filled with tears as I looked at the corner of the camp where I knew that there were eight hundred men, any one of whom would have died for his colonel. But my sadness vanished when I saw behind the tents the plumes of smoke which marked the headquarters at Torres Novas.

There was Massena, and, please God, at the cost of my life his mission would that night be done. A spasm of pride and exultation filled my breast. I should have liked to have had a voice of thunder that I might call to them, " Behold, it is I, Étienne Gerard, who will die in order to save the army of Clausel ! " It was, indeed, sad to think that so noble a deed should be done, and that no one should be there to tell the tale.

" Now," said the brigand chief, " you see the camp and you see also the road which leads to Coimbra. It is crowded with your fourgons and your ambulances. Does this mean that Massena is about to retreat ? "

One could see the dark moving lines of waggons with an occasional flash of steel from the escort. There could, apart from my promise, be no indiscretion in admitting that which was already obvious.

" He will retreat," said I.

" By Coimbra ? "

" I believe so."

" But the army of Clausel ? "

I shrugged my shoulders.

" Every path to the south is blocked. No message can reach them. If Massena falls back the army of Clausel is doomed."

" It must take its chance," said I.

" How many men has he ? "

" I should say about fourteen thousand."

" How much cavalry ? "

" One brigade of Montbrun's Division."

" What regiments ? "

" The 4th Chasseurs, the 9th Hussars and a regiment of Cuirassiers."

" Quite right," said he, looking at his note-book. " I can tell you speak the truth, and Heaven help you if you don't." Then, division by division, he went over the whole army, asking the composition of each brigade. Need I tell you that I would have had my tongue torn out before I would have told him such things had I not a

greater end in view? I would let him know all if I could but save the army of Clausel.

At last he closed his note-book and replaced it in his pocket. "I am obliged to you for this information, which shall reach Lord Wellington to-morrow," said he. "You have done your share of the bargain; it is for me now to perform mine. How would you wish to die? As a soldier you would, no doubt, prefer to be shot, but some think that a jump over the Merodal precipice is really an easier death. A good few have taken it, but we were, unfortunately, never able to get an opinion from them afterwards. There is the saw, too, which does not appear to be popular. We could hang you, no doubt, but it would involve the inconvenience of going down to the wood. However, a promise is a promise, and you seem to be an excellent fellow, so we will spare no pains to meet your wishes."

"You said," I answered, "that I must die before midnight. I will choose, therefore, just one minute before that hour."

"Very good," said he. "Such clinging to life is rather childish, but your wishes shall be met."

"As to the method," I added, "I love a death which all the world can see. Put me on yonder pile of faggots and burn me alive, as saints and martyrs have been burned before me. That is no common end, but one which an Emperor might envy."

The idea seemed to amuse him very much.

"Why not?" said he. "If Massena has sent you to spy upon us, he may guess what the fire upon the mountain means."

"Exactly," said I. "You have hit upon my very reason. He will guess, and all will know, that I have died a soldier's death."

"I see no objection whatever," said the brigand, with his abominable smile. "I will send some goat's flesh and wine into your hut. The sun is sinking, and it is nearly eight o'clock. In four hours be ready for your end."

It was a beautiful world to be leaving. I looked at the golden haze below, where the last rays of the sinking sun shone upon the blue waters of the winding Tagus and gleamed upon the white sails of the English transports. Very beautiful it was, and very sad to leave; but there are things more beautiful than that. The death that is died for the sake of others, honour, and duty, and loyalty, and love—these are the beauties far brighter than any which the eye can see. My breast was filled with admiration for my own most noble conduct, and with wonder whether any soul would ever come to know how I had placed myself in the heart of the beacon which saved the army of Clausel. I hoped so and I prayed so, for what a consolation it would be to my mother, what an example to the army, what a pride to my hussars! When De Pombal came at last into my hut with the food and the wine, the first request I made him was that he would write an account of my death and send it to the French camp. He answered not a word, but I ate my supper with a better appetite from the thought that my glorious fate would not be altogether unknown.

I had been there about two hours when the door opened again, and the chief stood looking in. I was in darkness, but a brigand with a torch stood beside him, and I saw his eyes and his teeth gleaming as he peered at me.

"Ready?" he asked.

"It is not yet time."

"You stand out for the last minute?"

"A promise is a promise."

"Very good. Be it so. We have a little justice to do among ourselves, for one of my fellows has been misbehaving. We have a strict rule of our own which is no respecter of persons, as De Pombal here could tell you. Do you truss him and lay him on the faggots, De Pombal, and I will return to see him die."

De Pombal and the man with the torch entered, while

I heard the steps of the chief passing away. De Pombal closed the door.

" Colonel Gerard," said he, " you must trust this man, for he is one of my party. It is neck or nothing. We may save you yet. But I take a great risk, and I want a definite promise. If we save you, will you guarantee that we have a friendly reception in the French camp and that all the past will be forgotten ? "

" I do guarantee it."

" And I trust your honour. Now, quick, quick, there is not an instant to lose ! If this monster returns we shall die horribly, all three."

I stared in amazement at what he did. Catching up a long rope he wound it round the body of my dead comrade, and he tied a cloth round his mouth so as to almost cover his face.

" Do you lie there ! " he cried, and he laid me in the place of the dead body. " I have four of my men waiting, and they will place this upon the beacon." He opened the door and gave an order. Several of the brigands entered and bore out Duplessis. For myself I remained upon the floor, with my mind in a turmoil of hope and wonder.

Five minutes later De Pombal and his men were back.

" You are laid upon the beacon," said he ; " I defy anyone in the world to say it is not you, and you are so gagged and bound that no one can expect you to speak or move. Now, it only remains to carry forth the body of Duplessis and to toss it over the Merodal precipice."

Two of them seized me by the head and two by the heels and carried me, stiff and inert, from the hut. As I came into the open air I could have cried out in my amazement. The moon had risen above the beacon, and there, clear outlined against its silver light, was the figure of the man stretched upon the top. The brigands were either in their camp or standing round the beacon, for none of them stopped or questioned our little party. De Pombal led them in the direction of the precipice.

At the brow we were out of sight, and there I was allowed to use my feet once more. De Pombal pointed to a narrow, winding track.

" This is the way down," said he, and then, suddenly, " Dios mio, what is that ? "

A terrible cry had risen out of the woods beneath us. I saw that De Pombal was shivering like a frightened horse.

" It is that devil," he whispered. " He is treating another as he treated me. But on, on, for Heaven help us if he lays his hands upon us ! "

One by one we crawled down the narrow goat track. At the bottom of the cliff we were back in the woods once more. Suddenly a yellow glare shone above us, and the black shadows of the tree-trunks started out in front. They had fired the beacon behind us. Even from where we stood we could see that impassive body amid the flames, and the black figures of the guerillas as they danced, howling like cannibals, round the pile. Ha ! how I shook my fist at them, the dogs, and how I vowed that one day my hussars and I would make the reckoning level !

De Pombal knew how the outposts were placed and all the paths which led through the forest. But to avoid these villains we had to plunge among the hills and walk for many a weary mile. And yet how gladly would I have walked those extra leagues if only for one sight which they brought to my eyes ! It may have been two o'clock in the morning when we halted upon the bare shoulder of a hill over which our path curled. Looking back we saw the red glow of the embers of the beacon as if volcanic fires were bursting from the tall peak of Merodal. And then, as I gazed, I saw something else—something which caused me to shriek with joy and to fall upon the ground, rolling in my delight. For, far away upon the southern horizon, there winked and twinkled one great yellow light, throbbing and flaming, the light of no house, the light of no star, but the answering beacon of

Mount d'Ossa, which told that the army of Clausel knew what Étienne Gerard had been sent to tell them.

5. *How the Brigadier triumphed in England*

I HAVE told you, my friends, how I triumphed over the English at the fox-hunt when I pursued the animal so fiercely that even the herd of trained dogs was unable to keep up, and alone with my own hand I put him to the sword. Perhaps I have said too much of the matter, but there is a thrill in the triumphs of sport which even warfare cannot give, for in warfare you share your successes with your regiment and your army, but in sport it is you yourself unaided who have won the laurels. It is an advantage which the English have over us that in all classes they take great interest in every form of sport. It may be that they are richer than we, or it may be that they are more idle; but I was surprised when I was a prisoner in that country to observe how widespread was this feeling, and how much it filled the minds and the lives of the people. A horse that will run, a cock that will fight, a dog that will kill rats, a man that will box—they would turn away from the Emperor in all his glory in order to look upon any of these.

I could tell you many stories of English sport, for I saw much of it during the time that I was the guest of Lord Rufton, after the order for my exchange had come to England. There were months before I could be sent back to France, and during that time I stayed with this good Lord Rufton at his beautiful house at High Combe, which is at the northern end of Dartmoor. He had ridden with the police when they had pursued me from Princetown, and he had felt towards me when I was overtaken as I would myself have felt had I, in my own country, seen a brave and debonair soldier without a friend to help him. In a word, he took me to his house,

clad me, fed me and treated me as if he had been my brother. I will say this of the English, that they were always generous enemies, and very good people with whom to fight. In the Peninsula the Spanish outposts would present their muskets at ours, but the British their brandy flasks. And of all these generous men there was none who was the equal of this admirable milord, who held out so warm a hand to an enemy in distress.

Ah ! what thoughts of sport it brings back to me, the very name of High Combe ! I can see it now, the long, low, brick house, warm and ruddy, with white plaster pillars before the door. He was a great sportsman this Lord Rufton, and all who were about him were of the same sort. But you will be pleased to hear that there were few things in which I could not hold my own, and in some I excelled. Behind the house was a wood in which pheasants were reared, and it was Lord Rufton's joy to kill these birds, which was done by sending in men to drive them out while he and his friends stood outside and shot them as they passed. For my part I was more crafty, for I studied the habits of the birds, and stealing out in the evening I was able to kill a number of them as they roosted in the trees. Hardly a single shot was wasted, but the keeper was attracted by the sound of the firing, and he implored me in his rough English fashion to spare those that were left. That night I was able to place twelve birds as a surprise upon Lord Rufton's supper table, and he laughed until he cried, so overjoyed was he to see them. " Gad, Gerard, you'll be the death of me yet ! " he cried. Often he said the same thing, for at every turn I amazed him by the way in which I entered into the sports of the English.

There is a game called cricket which they play in the summer, and this also I learned. Rudd, the head gardener, was a famous player of cricket, and so was Lord Rufton himself. Before the house was a lawn, and here it was that Rudd taught me the game. It is a brave pastime, a game for soldiers, for each tries to strike the

other with the ball, and it is but a small stick with which you may ward it off. Three sticks behind show the spot beyond which you may not retreat. I can tell you that it is no game for children, and I will confess that, in spite of my nine campaigns, I felt myself turn pale when first the ball flashed past me. So swift was it that I had not time to raise my stick to ward it off, but by good fortune it missed me and knocked down the wooden pins which marked the boundary. It was for Rudd then to defend himself and for me to attack. When I was a boy in Gascony I learned to throw both far and straight, so that I made sure that I could hit this gallant Englishman. With a shout I rushed forward and hurled the ball at him. It flew as swift as a bullet towards his ribs, but without a word he swung his staff and the ball rose a surprising distance in the air. Lord Rufton clapped his hands and cheered. Again the ball was brought to me, and again it was for me to throw. This time it flew past his head, and it seemed to me that it was his turn to look pale. But he was a brave man, this gardener, and again he faced me. Ah, my friends, the hour of my triumph had come ! It was a red waistcoat that he wore, and at this I hurled the ball. You would have said that I was a gunner, not a hussar, for never was so straight an aim. With a despairing cry—the cry of the brave man who is beaten—he fell upon the wooden pegs behind him, and they all rolled upon the ground together. He was cruel, this English milord, and he laughed so that he could not come to the aid of his servant. It was for me, the victor, to rush forwards to embrace this intrepid player, and to raise him to his feet with words of praise, and encouragement, and hope. He was in pain and could not stand erect, yet the honest fellow confessed that there was no accident in my victory. " He did it a-purpose ! He did it a-purpose ! " Again and again he said it. Yes, it is a great game this cricket, and I would gladly have ventured upon it again, but Lord Rufton and Rudd said that it was late in the season, and so they would play no more.

How foolish of me, the old broken man, to dwell upon these successes, and yet I will confess that my age has been very much soothed and comforted by the memory of the women who have loved me and the men whom I have overcome. It is pleasant to think that five years afterwards, when Lord Rufton came to Paris after the peace, he was able to assure me that my name was still a famous one in the north of Devonshire for the fine exploits that I had performed. Especially, he said, that they still talked over my boxing match with the Honourable Baldock. It came about in this way. Of an evening many sportsmen would assemble at the house of Lord Rufton, where they would drink much wine, make wild bets, and talk of their horses and their foxes. How well I remember those strange creatures. Sir Barrington, Jack Lupton of Barnstaple, Colonel Addison, Johnny Miller, Lord Sadler, and my enemy, the Honourable Baldock. They were of the same stamp all of them, drinkers, madcaps, fighters, gamblers, full of strange caprices and extraordinary whims. Yet they were kindly fellows in their rough fashion, save only this Baldock, a fat man who prided himself on his skill at the box-fight. It was he who, by his laughter against the French because they were ignorant of sport, caused me to challenge him in the very sport at which he excelled. You will say that it was foolish, my friends, but the decanter had passed many times, and the blood of youth ran hot in my veins. I would fight him, this boaster ; I would show him that if we had not skill, at least we had courage. Lord Rufton would not allow it. I insisted. The others cheered me on and slapped me on the back. " No, dash it, Baldock, he's our guest," said Rufton. " It's his own doing," the other answered. " Look here, Rufton, they can't hurt each other if they wear the mawleys," cried Lord Sadler. And so it was agreed.

What the mawleys were I did not know ; but presently they brought out four great puddings of leather, not unlike a fencing-glove, but larger. With these our

hands were covered after we had stripped ourselves of our coats and our waistcoats. Then the table, with the glasses and decanters, was pushed into the corner of the room, and behold us, face to face ! Lord Sadler in the armchair with a watch in his open hand. " Time ! " said he.

I will confess to you, my friends, that I felt at that moment a tremor such as none of my many duels have ever given me. With sword or pistol I am at home ; but here I only understood that I must struggle with this fat Englishman and do what I could, in spite of these great puddings upon my hands, to overcome him. And at the very outset I was disarmed of the best weapon that was left to me. " Mind, Gerard, no kicking ! " said Lord Rufton in my ear. I had only a pair of thin dancing slippers, and yet the man was fat, and a few well-directed kicks might have left me the victor. But there is an etiquette just as there is in fencing, and I refrained. I looked at this Englishman and I wondered how I should attack him. His ears were large and prominent. Could I seize them I might drag him to the ground. I rushed in, but I was betrayed by this flabby glove, and twice I lost my hold. He struck me, but I cared little for his blows, and again I seized him by the ear. He fell, and I rolled upon him and thumped his head upon the ground. How they cheered and laughed, these gallant Englishmen, and how they clapped me on the back !

" Even money on the Frenchman," cried Lord Sadler.

" He fights foul," cried the enemy, rubbing his crimson ears. " He savaged me on the ground."

" You must take your chance of that," said Lord Rufton coldly.

" Time," cried Lord Sadler, and once again we advanced to the assault.

He was flushed, and his small eyes were as vicious as those of a bulldog. There was hatred on his face. For my part I carried myself lightly and gaily. A French gentleman fights, but he does not hate. I drew myself

up before him, and I bowed as I have done in the duello. There can be grace and courtesy as well as defiance in a bow ; I put all three into this one, with a touch of ridicule in the shrug which accompanied it. It was at this moment that he struck me. The room spun round with me. I fell upon my back. But in an instant I was on my feet again and had rushed to a close combat. His ear, his hair, his nose, I seized them each in turn. Once again the mad joy of the battle was in my veins. The old cry of triumph rose to my lips. " Vive l'Empereur ! " I yelled as I drove my head into his stomach. He threw his arm round my neck, and holding me with one hand he struck me with the other. I buried my teeth in his arm, and he shouted with pain. " Call him off, Rufton ! " he screamed. " Call him off, man ! He's worrying me ! " They dragged me away from him. Can I ever forget it ?—the laughter, the cheering, the congratulations ! Even my enemy bore me no ill will, for he shook me by the hand. For my part I embraced him on each cheek. Five years afterwards I learned from Lord Rufton that my noble bearing upon that evening was still fresh in the memory of my English friends.

It is not, however, of my own exploits in sport that I wish to speak to you to-night, but it is of the Lady Jane Dacre and the strange adventure of which she was the cause. Lady Jane Dacre was Lord Rufton's sister and the lady of his household. I fear that until I came it was lonely for her, since she was a beautiful and refined woman with nothing in common with those who were about her. Indeed, this might be said of many women in the England of those days, for the men were rude and rough and coarse, with boorish habits and few accomplishments, while the women were the most lovely and tender that I have ever known. We became great friends, the Lady Jane and I, for it was not possible for me to drink three bottles of port after dinner like those Devonshire gentlemen and so I would seek refuge in her drawing-room, where evening after evening she would play the harpsi-

cord and I would sing the songs of my own land. In those peaceful moments I would find a refuge from the misery which filled me, when I reflected that my regiment was left in the front of the enemy without the chief whom they had learned to love and to follow. Indeed, I could have torn my hair when I read in the English papers of the fine fighting which was going on in Portugal and on the frontiers of Spain, all of which I had missed through my misfortune in falling into the hands of Milord Wellington.

From what I have told you of the Lady Jane you will have guessed what occurred, my friends. Étienne Gerard is thrown into the company of a young and beautiful woman. What must it mean for him? What must it mean for her? It was not for me, the guest, the captive, to make love to the sister of my host. But I was reserved. I was discreet. I tried to curb my own emotions and to discourage hers. For my own part I fear that I betrayed myself, for the eye becomes more eloquent when the tongue is silent. Every quiver of my fingers as I turned over her music-sheets told her my secret. But she—she was admirable. It is in these matters that women have a genius for deception. If I had not penetrated her secret I should often have thought that she forgot even that I was in the house. For hours she would sit lost in a sweet melancholy, while I admired her pale face and her curls in the lamp-light, and thrilled within me to think that I had moved her so deeply. Then at last I would speak, and she would start in her chair and stare at me with the most admirable pretence of being surprised to find me in the room. Ah! how I longed to hurl myself suddenly at her feet, to kiss her white hand, to assure her that I had surprised her secret and that I would not abuse her confidence. But, no, I was not her equal, and I was under her roof as a castaway enemy. My lips were sealed. I endeavoured to imitate her own wonderful affectation of indifference, but, as you may think, I was eagerly alert for any opportunity of serving her.

One morning Lady Jane had driven in her phaeton to Okehampton, and I strolled along the road which led to that place in the hope that I might meet her on her return. It was the early winter, and banks of fading fern sloped down to the winding road. It is a bleak place this Dartmoor, wild and rocky—a country of wind and mist. I felt as I walked that it is no wonder Englishmen should suffer from the spleen. My own heart was heavy within me, and I sat upon a rock by the wayside looking out on the dreary view with my thoughts full of trouble and foreboding. Suddenly, however, as I glanced down the road I saw a sight which drove everything else from my mind, and caused me to leap to my feet with a cry of astonishment and anger.

Down the curve of the road a phaeton was coming, the pony tearing along at full gallop. Within was the very lady whom I had come to meet. She lashed at the pony like one who endeavours to escape from some pressing danger, glancing ever backwards over her shoulder. The bend of the road concealed from me what it was that had alarmed her, and I ran forward not knowing what to expect. The next instant I saw the pursuer, and my amazement was increased at the sight. It was a gentleman in the red coat of an English fox-hunter, mounted on a great grey horse. He was galloping as if in a race, and the long stride of the splendid creature beneath him soon brought him up to the lady's flying carriage. I saw him stoop and seize the reins of the pony, so as to bring it to a halt. The next instant he was deep in talk with the lady, he bending forward in his saddle and speaking eagerly, she shrinking away from him as if she feared and loathed him.

You may think, my dear friends, that this was not a sight at which I could calmly gaze. How my heart thrilled within me to think that a chance should have been given to me to serve the Lady Jane! I ran—oh, good Lord, how I ran! At last breathless, speechless, I reached the phaeton. The man glanced up at me with

his blue English eyes, but so deep was he in his talk that he paid no heed to me, nor did the lady say a word. She still leaned back, her beautiful pale face gazing up at him. He was a good-looking fellow—tall, and strong, and brown ; a pang of jealousy seized me as I looked at him. He was talking low and fast, as the English do when they are in earnest.

" I tell you, Jinny, it's you and only you that I love," said he. " Don't bear malice, Jinny. Let bygones by bygones. Come now, say it's all over."

" No, never, George, never ! " she cried.

A dusky red suffused his handsome face. The man was furious.

" Why can't you forgive me, Jinny ? "

" I can't forget the past."

" By George, you must ! I've asked enough. It's time to order now. I'll have my rights. D'ye hear ? " His hand closed upon her wrist.

At last my breath had returned to me.

" Madame," I said, as I raised my hat, " do I intrude, or is there any possible way in which I can be of service to you ? "

But neither of them minded me any more than if I had been a fly who buzzed between them. Their eyes were locked together.

" I'll have my rights, I tell you. I've waited long enough."

" There's no use bullying, George."

" Do you give in ? "

" No, never ! "

" Is that your final answer ? "

" Yes, it is."

He gave a bitter curse and threw down her hand.

" All right, my lady, we'll see about this."

" Excuse me, sir," said I, with dignity.

" Oh, go to blazes ! " he cried, turning on me with his furious face. The next instant he had spurred his horse and was galloping down the road once more.

Lady Jane gazed after him until he was out of sight, and I was surprised to see that her face wore a smile and not a frown. Then she turned to me and held out her hand.

" You are very kind, Colonel Gerard. You meant well, I am sure."

" Madame," said I, " if you can oblige me with the gentleman's name and address I will arrange that he shall never trouble you again."

" No scandal, I beg of you," she cried.

" Madame, I could not so far forget myself. Rest assured that no lady's name would ever be mentioned by me in the course of such an incident. In bidding me to go to blazes this gentleman has relieved me from the embarrassment of having to invent a cause of quarrel."

" Colonel Gerard," said the lady, earnestly, " you must give me your word as a soldier and a gentleman that this matter goes no farther, and also that you will say nothing to my brother about what you have seen. Promise me ! "

" If I must."

" I hold you to your word. Now drive with me to High Combe, and I will explain as we go."

The first words of her explanation went into me like a sabre-point.

" That gentleman," said she, " is my husband."

" Your husband ! "

" You must have known that I was married." She seemed surprised at my agitation.

" I did not know."

" He is Lord George Dacre. We have been married two years. There is no need to tell you how he wronged me. I left him and sought a refuge under my brother's roof. Up till to-day he has lett me there unmolested. What I must above all things avoid is the chance of a duel betwixt my husband and my brother. It is horrible to think of. For this reason Lord Rufton must know nothing of this chance meeting of to-day."

" If my pistol could free you from this annoyance——"

" No, no, it is not to be thought of. Remember your promise, Colonel Gerard. And not a word at High Combe of what you have seen ! "

Her husband ! I had pictured in my mind that she was a young widow. This brown-faced brute with his " go to blazes " was the husband of this tender dove of a woman. Oh, if she would but allow me to free her from so odious an encumbrance ! There is no divorce so quick and certain as that which I could give her. But a promise is a promise, and I kept it to the letter. My mouth was sealed. In a week I was to be sent back from Plymouth to St. Malo, and it seemed to me that I might never hear the sequel of the story. And yet it was destined that it should have a sequel, and that I should play a very pleasing and honourable part in it.

It was only three days after the event which I have described when Lord Rufton burst hurriedly into my room. His face was pale, and his manner that of a man in extreme agitation.

" Gerard," he cried, " have you seen Lady Jane Dacre ? "

I had seen her after breakfast, and it was now midday.

" By Heaven, there's villainy here ! " cried my poor friend, rushing about like a madman. " The bailiff has been up to say that a chaise and pair were seen driving full split down the Tavistock Road. The blacksmith heard a woman scream as it passed his forge. Jane has disappeared. By the Lord, I believe that she has been kidnapped by this villain Dacre." He rang the bell furiously. " Two horses this instant ! " he cried. " Colonel Gerard, your pistols ! Jane comes back with me this night from Gravel Hanger, or there will be a new master in High Combe Hall."

Behold us then within half an hour, like two knight-errants of old, riding forth to the rescue of this lady in distress. It was near Tavistock that Lord Dacre lived, and at every house and toll-gate along the road we heard

the news of the flying post-chaise in front of us, so there could be no doubt whither they were bound. As we rode Lord Rufton told me of the man whom we were pursuing. His name, it seems, was a household word throughout all England for every sort of mischief. Wine, women, dice, cards, racing—in all forms of debauchery he had carned for himself a terrible name. He was of an old and noble family, and it had been hoped that he had sowed his wild oats when he married the beautiful Lady Jane Rufton. For some months he had indeed behaved well, and then he had wounded her feelings in their most tender part by some unworthy *liaison*. She had fled from his house and taken refuge with her brother, from whose care she had now been dragged once more, against her will. I ask you if two men could have had a fairer errand than that upon which Lord Rufton and myself were riding ?

" That's Gravel Hanger," he cried at last, pointing with his crop ; and there on the green side of a hill was an old brick and timber building as beautiful as only an English country house can be. " There's an inn by the park-gate, and there we shall leave our horses," he added.

For my own part it seemed to me that with so just a cause we should have done best to ride boldly up to his door and summon him to surrender the lady. But there I was wrong. For the one thing which every Englishman fears is the law. He makes it himself, and when he has once made it it becomes a terrible tyrant before whom the bravest quails. He will smile at breaking his neck, but he will turn pale at breaking the law. It seems, then, from what Lord Rufton told me as we walked through the park, that we were on the wrong side of the law in this matter. Lord Dacre was in the right in carrying off his wife, since she did indeed belong to him, and our own position now was nothing better than that of burglars and trespassers. It was not for burglars to openly approach the front door. We could take the lady by force or by craft, but we could not take her by right, for the law was

against us. This was what my friend explained to me as we crept up towards the shelter of a shrubbery which was close to the windows of the house. Thence we could examine this fortress, see whether we could effect a lodgment in it, and, above all, try to establish some communication with the beautiful prisoner inside.

There we were, then, in the shrubbery, Lord Rufton and I, each with a pistol in the pockets of our riding-coats, and with the most resolute determination in our hearts that we should not return without the lady. Eagerly we scanned every window of the wide-spread house. Not a sign could we see of the prisoner or of anyone else; but on the gravel drive outside the door were the deep-sunk marks of the wheels of the chaise. There was no doubt that they had arrived. Crouching among the laurel bushes we held a whispered council of war, but a singular interruption brought it to an end.

Out of the door of the house there stepped a tall, flaxen-haired man, such a figure as one would choose for the flank of a grenadier company. As he turned his brown face and his blue eyes towards us I recognised Lord Dacre. With long strides he came down the gravel path straight for the spot where we lay.

"Come out, Ned!" he shouted; "you'll have the gamekeeper putting a charge of shot into you. Come out, man, and don't skulk behind the bushes."

It was not a very heroic situation for us. My poor friend rose with a crimson face. I sprang to my feet also and bowed with such dignity as I could muster.

"Halloa! it's the Frenchman, is it?" said he, without returning my bow. "I've got a crow to pluck with him already. As to you, Ned, I knew you would be hot on our scent, and so I was looking out for you. I saw you cross the park and go to ground in the shrubbery. Come in, man, and let us have all the cards on the table."

He seemed master of the situation, this handsome giant of a man, standing at his ease on his own ground while we slunk out of our hiding-place. Lord Rufton

had said not a word, but I saw by his darkened brow and his sombre eyes that the storm was gathering. Lord Dacre led the way into the house, and we followed close at his heels. He ushered us himself into an oak-panelled sitting-room, closing the door behind us. Then he looked me up and down with insolent eyes.

"Look here, Ned," said he, "time was when an English family could settle their own affairs in their own way. What has this foreign fellow got to do with your sister and my wife?"

"Sir," said I, "permit me to point out to you that this is not a case merely of a sister or a wife, but that I am the friend of the lady in question, and that I have the privilege which every gentleman possesses of protecting a woman against brutality. It is only by a gesture that I can show you what I think of you." I had my riding glove in my hand, and I flicked him across the face with it. He drew back with a bitter smile and his eyes were as hard as flint.

"So you've brought your bully with you, Ned?" said he. "You might at least have done your fighting yourself, if it must come to a fight."

"So I will," cried Lord Rufton. "Here and now."

"When I've killed this swaggering Frenchman," said Lord Dacre. He stepped to a side table and opened a brass-bound case. "By Gad," said he, "either that man or I go out of this room feet foremost. I meant well by you, Ned; I did, by George, but I'll shoot this led-captain of yours as sure as my name's George Dacre. Take your choice of pistols, sir, and shoot across this table. The barkers are loaded. Aim straight and kill me if you can, for, by the Lord, if you don't, you're done."

In vain Lord Rufton tried to take the quarrel upon himself. Two things were clear in my mind—one that the Lady Jane had feared above all things that her husband and brother should fight, the other that if I could but kill this big milord, then the whole question would be settled for ever in the best way. Lord Rufton

did not want him. Lady Jane did not want him. Therefore, I, Étienne Gerard, their friend, would pay the debt of gratitude which I owed them by freeing them of this encumbrance. But, indeed, there was no choice in the matter, for Lord Dacre was as eager to put a bullet into me as I could be to do the same service to him In vain Lord Rufton argued and scolded. The affair must continue.

"Well, if you must fight my guest instead of myself, let it be to-morrow morning with two witnesses," he cried at last; "this is sheer murder across the table."

"But it suits my humour, Ned," said Lord Dacre.

"And mine, sir," said I.

"Then I'll have nothing to do with it," cried Lord Rufton. "I tell you, George, if you shoot Colonel Gerard under these circumstances you'll find yourself in the dock instead of on the bench. I won't act as second, and that's flat."

"Sir," said I, "I am perfectly prepared to proceed without a second."

"That won't do. It's against the law," cried Lord Dacre. "Come, Ned, don't be a fool. You see we mean to fight. Hang it, man, all I want you to do is to drop a handkerchief."

"I'll take no part in it."

"Then I must find someone who will," said Lord Dacre. He threw a cloth over the pistols, which lay upon the table, and he rang the bell. A footman entered. "Ask Colonel Berkeley if he will step this way. You will find him in the billiard-room."

A moment later there entered a tall thin Englishman with a great moustache, which was a rare thing amid that clean-shaven race. I have heard since that they were worn only by the Guards and the Hussars. This Colonel Berkeley was a guardsman. He seemed a strange, tired, languid, drawling creature with a long black cigar thrusting out, like a pole from a bush, amidst that immense moustache. He looked from one to the

other of us with true English phlegm, and he betrayed not the slightest surprise when he was told our intention.

"Quite so," said he; "quite so."

"I refuse to act, Colonel Berkeley," cried Lord Rufton. "Remember, this duel cannot proceed without you, and I hold you personally responsible for anything that happens."

This Colonel Berkeley appeared to be an authority upon the question, for he removed the cigar from his mouth and he laid down the law in his strange, drawling voice.

"The circumstances are unusual, but not irregular, Lord Rufton," said he. "This gentleman has given a blow, and this other gentleman has received it. That is a clear issue. Time and conditions depend upon the person who demands satisfaction. Very good. He claims it here and now, across the table. He is acting within his rights. I am prepared to accept the responsibility."

There was nothing more to be said. Lord Rufton sat moodily in the corner, with his brows drawn down and his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his riding-breeches. Colonel Berkeley examined the two pistols and laid them both in the centre of the table. Lord Dacre was at one end and I at the other, with eight feet of shining mahogany between us. On the hearthrug, with his back to the fire, stood the tall colonel, his handkerchief in his left hand, his cigar between two fingers of his right.

"When I drop the handkerchief," said he, "you will pick up your pistols and you will fire at your own convenience. Are you ready?"

"Yes," we cried.

His hand opened, and the handkerchief fell. I bent swiftly forward and seized a pistol, but the table, as I have said, was eight feet across, and it was easier for this long-armed milord to reach the pistols than it was for me. I had not yet drawn myself straight before he fired, and to this it was that I owe my life. His bullet would have

blown out my brains had I been erect. As it was it whistled through my curls. At the same instant, just as I threw up my own pistol to fire, the door flew open, and a pair of arms were thrown round me. It was the beautiful, flushed, frantic face of Lady Jane which looked up into mine.

"You shan't fire! Colonel Gerard, for my sake, don't fire," she cried. "It is a mistake, I tell you—a mistake, a mistake! He is the best and dearest of husbands. Never again shall I leave his side." Her hands slid down my arm and closed upon my pistol.

"Jane, Jane," cried Lord Rufton; "come with me. You should not be here. Come away."

"It is all confoundedly irregular," said Colonel Berkeley.

"Colonel Gerard, you won't fire, will you? My heart would break if he were hurt."

"Hang it all, Jinny, give the fellow fair play," cried Lord Dacre. "He stood my fire like a man, and I won't see him interfered with. Whatever happens, I can't get worse than I deserve."

But already there had passed between me and the lady a quick glance of the eyes which told her everything. Her hands slipped from my arm. "I leave my husband's life and my own happiness to Colonel Gerard," said she.

How well she knew me, this admirable woman! I stood for an instant irresolute, with the pistol cocked in my hand. My antagonist faced me bravely, with no blenching of his sunburnt face and no flinching of his bold, blue eyes.

"Come, come, sir, take your shot!" cried the colonel from the mat.

"Let us have it, then," said Lord Dacre.

I would, at least, show them how completely his life was at the mercy of my skill. So much I owed to my own self-respect. I glanced round for a mark. The colonel was looking towards my antagonist, expecting to

see him drop. His face was sideways to me, his long cigar projecting from his lips with an inch of ash at the end of it. Quick as a flash I raised my pistol and fired.

"Permit me to trim your ash, sir," said I, and I bowed with a grace which is unknown among these islanders.

I am convinced that the fault lay with the pistol and not with my aim. I could hardly believe my own eyes when I saw that I had snapped off the cigar within half an inch of his lips. He stood staring at me with the ragged stub of the cigar-end sticking out from his singed moustache. I can see him now with his foolish, angry eyes and his long, thin, puzzled face. Then he began to talk. I have always said that the English are not really a phlegmatic or a taciturn nation if you stir them out of their groove. No one could have talked in a more animated way than this colonel. Lady Jane put her hands over her ears.

"Come, come, Colonel Berkeley," said Lord Dacre, sternly, "you forget yourself. There is a lady in the room."

The colonel gave a stiff bow.

"If Lady Dacre will kindly leave the room," said he, "I will be able to tell this infernal little Frenchman what I think of him and his monkey tricks."

I was splendid at that moment, for I ignored the words that he had said and remembered only the extreme provocation.

"Sir," said I, "I freely offer you my apologies for this unhappy incident. I felt that if I did not discharge my pistol Lord Dacre's honour might feel hurt, and yet it was quite impossible for me, after hearing what this lady had said, to aim it at her husband. I looked round for a mark, therefore, and I had the extreme misfortune to blow your cigar out of your mouth when my intention had merely been to snuff the ash. I was betrayed by my pistol. This is my explanation, sir, and if after listening to my apologies you still feel that I owe you satisfaction,

I need not say that it is a request which I am unable to refuse."

It was certainly a charming attitude which I had assumed, and it won the hearts of all of them. Lord Dacre stepped forward and wrung me by the hand. "By George, sir," said he, "I never thought to feel towards a Frenchman as I do to you. You're a man and a gentleman, and I can't say more." Lord Rufton said nothing, but his hand-grip told me all that he thought. Even Colonel Berkeley paid me a compliment, and declared that he would think no more about the unfortunate cigar. And she—ah, if you could have seen the look she gave me, the flushed cheek, the moist eye, the tremulous lip! When I think of my beautiful Lady Jane it is at that moment that I recall her. They would have had me stay to dinner, but you will understand, my friends, that this was no time for either Lord Rufton or myself to remain at Gravel Hanger. This reconciled couple desired only to be alone. In the chaise he had persuaded her of his sincere repentance, and once again they were a loving husband and wife. If they were to remain so, it was best perhaps that I should go. Why should I unsettle that domestic peace? Even against my own will my mere presence and appearance might have their effect upon the lady. No, no, I must tear myself away—even her persuasions were unable to make me stop. Years afterwards I heard that the household of the Dacres was among the happiest in the whole country, and that no cloud had ever come again to darken their lives. Yet I dare say if he could have seen into his wife's mind—but there, I say no more! A lady's secret is her own, and I fear that she and it are buried long years ago in some Devonshire churchyard. Perhaps all that gay circle are gone and the Lady Jane only lives now in the memory of an old half-pay French brigadier. He at least can never forget.

6. *How the Brigadier rode to Minsk*

I WOULD have a stronger wine to-night, my friends, a wine of Burgundy rather than of Bordeaux. It is that my heart, my old soldier heart, is heavy within me. It is a strange thing, this age which creeps upon one. One does not know, one does not understand; the spirit is ever the same, and one does not remember how the poor body crumbles. But there comes a moment when it is brought home, when quick as the sparkle of a whirling sabre it is clear to us, and we see the men we were and the men we are. Yes, yes, it was so to-day, and I would have a wine of Burgundy to-night, White Burgundy—Montrachet—— Sir, I am your debtor!

It was this morning in the Champ de Mars. Your pardon, friends, while an old man tells his trouble. You saw the review. Was it not splendid? I was in the enclosure for veteran officers who have been decorated. This ribbon on my breast was my passport. The cross itself I keep at home in a leathern pouch. They did us honour, for we were placed at the saluting point, with the Emperor and the carriages of the Court upon our right.

It is years since I have been to a review, for I cannot approve of many things which I have seen. I do not approve of the red breeches of the infantry. It was in white breeches that the infantry used to fight. Red is for the cavalry. A little more, and they would ask our busbies and our spurs! Had I been seen at a review they might well have said that I, Étienne Gerard, had condoned it. So I have stayed at home. But this war of the Crimea is different. The men go to battle. It is not for me to be absent when brave men gather.

My faith, they march well, those little infantrymen! They are not large, but they are very solid and they carry themselves well. I took off my hat to them as they passed. Then there came the guns. They were good

guns, well horsed, and well manned. I took off my hat to them. Then came the engineers, and to them also I took off my hat. There are no braver men than the engineers. Then came the cavalry : lancers, cuirassiers, chasseurs and spahis. To all of them in turn I was able to take off my hat, save only to the spahis. The Emperor had no spahis. But when all of the others had passed, what think you came at the close ? A brigade of hussars, and at the charge ! Oh, my friends, the pride and the glory and the beauty, the flash and the sparkle, the roar of the hoofs, and the jingle of chains, the tossing manes, the noble heads, the rolling cloud and the dancing waves of steel ! My heart drummed to them as they passed. And the last of all, was it not my own old regiment ? My eyes fell upon the grey and silver dolmans, with the leopard-skin shabracks, and at that instant the years fell away from me and I saw my own beautiful men and horses, even as they had swept behind their young colonel, in the pride of our youth and our strength, just forty years ago. Up flew my cane. " Chargez ! En avant ! Vive l'Empereur ! " It was the past calling to the present. But, oh, what a thin, piping voice ! Was this the voice that had once thundered from wing to wing of a strong brigade ? And the arm that could scarce wave a cane, were these the muscles of fire and steel which had no match in all Napoleon's mighty host ? They smiled at me. They cheered me. The Emperor laughed and bowed. But to me the present was a dim dream, and what was real were my eight hundred dead hussars and the Étienne of long ago. Enough—a brave man can face age and fate as he faced Cossacks and Uhlans. But there are times when Montrachet is better than the wine of Bordeaux.

It is to Russia that they go, and so I will tell you a story of Russia. Ah, what an evil dream of the night it seems ! Blood and ice. Ice and blood. Fierce faces with snow upon the whiskers. Blue hands held out for succour. And across the great white plain the one long

black line of moving figures, trudging, trudging, a hundred miles, another hundred, and still always the same white plain. Sometimes there were fir-woods to limit it, sometimes it stretched away to the cold blue sky, but the black line stumbled on and on. Those weary, ragged, starving men, the spirit frozen out of them, looked neither to right nor left, but with sunken faces and rounded backs trailed onwards and ever onwards, making for France as wounded beasts make for their lair. There was no speaking, and you could scarce hear the shuffle of feet in the snow. Once only I heard them laugh. It was outside Wilna when an aide-de-camp rode up to the head of that dreadful column and asked if that were the Grand Army. All who were within hearing looked round, and when they saw those broken men, those ruined regiments, those fur-capped skeletons who were once the Guard, they laughed, and the laugh crackled down the column like a *feu de joie*. I have heard many a groan and cry and scream in my life, but nothing so terrible as the laugh of the Grand Army.

But why was it that these helpless men were not destroyed by the Russians? Why was it that they were not speared by the Cossacks or herded into droves, and driven as prisoners into the heart of Russia? On every side as you watched the black snake winding over the snow you saw also dark, moving shadows which came and went like cloud drifts on either flank and behind. They were the Cossacks, who hung round us like wolves round the flock. But the reason why they did not ride in upon us was that all the ice of Russia could not cool the hot hearts of some of our soldiers. To the end there were always those who were ready to throw themselves between these savages and their prey. One man above all rose greater as the danger thickened, and won a higher name amid disaster than he had done when he led our van to victory. To him I drink this glass—to Ney, the red-maned Lion, glaring back over his shoulder at the enemy who feared to tread too closely on his heels. I can see him now, his

broad white face convulsed with fury, his light blue eyes sparkling like flints, his great voice roaring and crashing amid the roll of the musketry. His glazed and featherless cocked hat was the ensign upon which France rallied during those dreadful days.

It is well known that neither I nor the regiment of Hussars of Conflans were at Moscow. We were left behind on the lines of communication at Borodino. How the Emperor could have advanced without us is incomprehensible to me, and, indeed, it was only then that I understood that his judgment was weakening, and that he was no longer the man that he had been. However, a soldier has to obey orders, and so I remained at this village, which was poisoned by the bodies of thirty thousand men who had lost their lives in the great battle. I spent the late autumn in getting my horses into condition and reclothing my men, so that when the army fell back on Borodino my hussars were the best of the cavalry, and were placed under Ney in the rear-guard. What could he have done without us during those dreadful days? "Ah, Gerard," said he one evening—but it is not for me to repeat the words. Suffice it that he spoke what the whole army felt. The rear-guard covered the army, and the Hussars of Conflans covered the rear-guard. There was the whole truth in a sentence. Always the Cossacks were on us. Always we held them off. Never a day passed that we had not to wipe our sabres. That was soldiering indeed.

But there came a time between Wilna and Smolensk when the situation became impossible. Cossacks and even cold we could fight, but we could not fight hunger as well. Food must be got at all costs. That night Ney sent for me to the waggon in which he slept. His great head was sunk on his hands. Mind and body, he was wearied to death.

"Colonel Gerard," said he, "things are going very badly with us. The men are starving. We must have food at all costs."

" The horses," I suggested.
" Save your handful of cavalry, there are none left."
" The band," said I.
He laughed, even in his despair.
" Why the band ? " he asked.
" Fighting men are of value."

" Good ! " said he. " You would play the game down to the last card, and so would I. Good, Gerard, good ! " He clasped my hand in his. " But there is one chance for us yet, Gerard." He unhooked a lantern from the roof of the waggon, and he laid it on a map which was stretched before him. " To the south of us," said he, " there lies the town of Minsk. I have word from a Russian deserter that much corn has been stored in the town hall. I wish you to take as many men as you think best, set forth for Minsk, seize the corn, load any carts which you may collect in the town, and bring them to me between here and Smolensk. If you fail, it is but a detachment cut off. If you succeed, it is new life to the army."

He had not expressed himself well, for it was evident that if we failed it was not merely the loss of a detachment. It is quality as well as quantity which counts. And yet how honourable a mission, and how glorious a risk ! If mortal men could bring it, then the corn should come from Minsk. I said so, and spoke a few burning words about a brave man's duty until the Marshal was so moved that he rose and, taking me affectionately by the shoulders, pushed me out of the waggon.

It was clear to me that in order to succeed in my enterprise I should take a small force and depend rather upon surprise than upon numbers. A large body could not conceal itself, would have great difficulty in getting food, and would cause all the Russians around us to concentrate for its certain destruction. On the other hand, if a small body of cavalry could get past the Cossacks unseen it was probable that they would find no troops to oppose them, for we knew that the main Russian army

was several days' march behind us. This corn was meant, no doubt, for their consumption. A squadron of hussars and thirty Polish lancers were all whom I chose for the venture. That very night we rode out of the camp, and struck south in the direction of Minsk.

Fortunately there was but half a moon, and we were able to pass without being attacked by the enemy. Twice we saw great fires burning amid the snow, and around them a thick bristle of long poles. These were the lances of Cossacks, which they had stood upright while they slept. It would have been a great joy to us to have charged in amongst them, for we had much to revenge, and the eyes of my comrades looked longingly from me to those red flickering patches in the darkness. My faith, I was sorely tempted to do it, for it would have been a good lesson to teach them that they must keep a few miles between themselves and a French army. It is the essence of good generalship, however, to keep one thing before one at a time, and so we rode silently on through the snow, leaving these Cossack bivouacs to right and left. Behind us the black sky was all mottled with a line of flame, which showed where our own poor wretches were trying to keep themselves alive for another day of misery and starvation.

All night we rode slowly onwards, keeping our horses' tails to the Pole Star. There were many tracks in the snow, and we kept to the line of these, that no one might remark that a body of cavalry had passed that way. These are the little precautions which mark the experienced officer. Besides, by keeping to the tracks we were most likely to find the villages, and only in the villages could we hope to get food. The dawn of day found us in a thick fir-wood, the trees so loaded with snow that the light could hardly reach us. When we had found our way out of it it was full daylight, the rim of the rising sun peeping over the edge of the great snow-plain and turning it crimson from end to end. I halted my hussars and lancers under the shadow of the wood, and I studied the

country. Close to us there was a small farmhouse. Beyond, at a distance of several miles, was a village. Far away on the skyline rose a considerable town all bristling with church towers. This must be Minsk. In no direction could I see any signs of troops. It was evident that we had passed through the Cossacks, and that there was nothing between us and our goal. A joyous shout burst from my men when I told them our position, and we advanced rapidly towards the village.

I have said, however, that there was a small farmhouse immediately in front of us. As we rode up to it I observed that a fine grey horse with a military saddle was tethered by the door. Instantly I galloped forward, but before I could reach it a man dashed out of the door, flung himself on to the horse, and rode furiously away, the crisp, dry snow flying up in a cloud behind him. The sunlight gleamed upon his gold epaulettes, and I knew that he was a Russian officer. He would raise the whole country-side if we did not catch him. I put spurs to Violette and flew after him. My troopers followed; but there was no horse among them to compare with Violette, and I knew well that if I could not catch the Russian I need expect no help from them.

But it is a swift horse indeed and a skilful rider who can hope to escape from Violette with Étienne Gerard in the saddle. He rode well, this young Russian, and his mount was a good one, but gradually we wore him down. His face glanced continually over his shoulder—a dark, handsome face, with eyes like an eagle—and I saw as I closed with him that he was measuring the distance between us. Suddenly he half turned; there were a flash and a crack as his pistol bullet hummed past my ear. Before he could draw his sword I was upon him; but he still spurred his horse, and the two galloped together over the plain, I with my leg against the Russian's and my left hand upon his right shoulder. I saw his hand fly up to his mouth. Instantly I dragged him across my pommel and seized him by the throat, so that he could not

swallow. His horse shot from under him, but I held him fast, and Violette came to a stand. Sergeant Oudin of the hussars was the first to join us. He was an old soldier, and he saw at a glance what I was after.

"Hold tight, Colonel," said he; "I'll do the rest."

He slipped out his knife, thrust the blade between the clenched teeth of the Russian, and turned it so as to force his mouth open. There, on his tongue, was the little wad of wet paper which he had been so anxious to swallow. Oudin picked it out, and I let go of the man's throat. From the way in which, half strangled as he was, he glanced at the paper I was sure that it was a message of extreme importance. His hands twitched as if he longed to snatch it from me. He shrugged his shoulders, however, and smiled good-humouredly when I apologised for my roughness.

"And now to business," said I, when he had done coughing and hawking. "What is your name?"

"Alexis Barakoff."

"Your rank and regiment?"

"Captain of the Dragoons of Grodno."

"What is this note which you were carrying?"

"It is a line which I had written to my sweetheart."

"Whose name," said I, examining the address, "is the Hetman Platoff. Come, come, sir, this is an important military document, which you are carrying from one general to another. Tell me this instant what it is."

"Read it, and then you will know." He spoke perfect French, as do most of the educated Russians. But he knew well that there is not one French officer in a thousand who knows a word of Russian. The inside of the note contained one single line which ran like this:—

"Pustj Franzuzy pridutt v Minsk. Min gotovy."

I stared at it, and I had to shake my head. Then I showed it to my hussars, but they could make nothing of it. The Poles were all rough fellows who could not read or write, save only the sergeant, who came from Memel, in East Prussia, and knew no Russian. It was

maddening, for I felt that I had possession of some important secret upon which the safety of the army might depend, and yet I could make no sense of it. Again I entreated our prisoner to translate it, and offered him his freedom if he would do so. He only smiled at my request. I could not but admire him, for it was the very smile which I should have myself smiled had I been in his position.

"At least," said I, "tell us the name of this village."

"It is Dobrova."

"And that is Minsk over yonder, I suppose?"

"Yes, that is Minsk."

"Then we shall go to the village and we shall very soon find someone who will translate this despatch."

So we rode onward together, a trooper with his carbine on either side of our prisoner. The village was but a little place, and I set a guard at the ends of the single street, so that no one could escape from it. It was necessary to call a halt and to find some food for the men and horses, since they had travelled all night and had a long journey still before them.

There was one large stone house in the centre of the village, and to this I rode. It was the house of the priest —a snuffy and ill-favoured old man who had not a civil answer to any of our questions. An uglier fellow I never met, but, my faith, it was very different with his only daughter, who kept house for him. She was a brunette, a rare thing in Russia, with creamy skin, raven hair and a pair of the most glorious dark eyes that ever kindled at the sight of a hussar. From the first glance I saw that she was mine. It was no time for love-making when a soldier's duty had to be done, but still, as I took the simple meal which they laid before me, I chatted lightly with the lady, and we were the best of friends before an hour had passed. Sophie was her first name, her second I never knew. I taught her to call me Étienne, and I tried to cheer her up, for her sweet face was sad and there

were tears in her beautiful dark eyes. I pressed her to tell me what it was which was grieving her.

"How can I be otherwise," said she, speaking French with a most adorable lisp, "when one of my poor countrymen is a prisoner in your hands? I saw him between two of your hussars as you rode into the village."

"It is the fortune of war," said I. "His turn to-day; mine, perhaps, to-morrow."

"But consider, Monsieur——" said she.

"Étienne," said I.

"Oh, Monsieur——"

"Étienne," said I.

"Well, then," she cried, beautifully flushed and desperate, "consider, Étienne, that this young officer will be taken back to your army and will be starved or frozen, for if, as I hear, your own soldiers have a hard march, what will be the lot of a prisoner?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"You have a kind face, Étienne," said she; "you would not condemn this poor man to certain death. I entreat you to let him go."

Her delicate hand rested upon my sleeve, her dark eyes looked imploringly into mine.

A sudden thought passed through my mind. I would grant her request, but I would demand a favour in return. At my order the prisoner was brought up into the room.

"Captain Barakoff," said I, "this young lady has begged me to release you, and I am inclined to do so. I would ask you to give your parole that you will remain in this dwelling for twenty-four hours, and take no steps to inform anyone of our movements."

"I will do so," said he.

"Then I trust in your honour. One man more or less can make no difference in a struggle between great armies, and to take you back as a prisoner would be to condemn you to death. Depart, sir, and show your gratitude not to me, but to the first French officer who falls into your hands."

When he was gone I drew my paper from my pocket.

" Now, Sophie," said I, " I have done what you asked me and all that I ask in return is that you will give me a lesson in Russian."

" With all my heart," said she.

" Let us begin on this," said I, spreading out the paper before her. " Let us take it word for word and see what it means."

She looked at the writing with some surprise. " It means," said she, " if the French come to Minsk all is lost." Suddenly a look of consternation passed over her beautiful face. " Great heavens ! " she cried, " what is it that I have done ? I have betrayed my country ! Oh, Étienne, your eyes are the last for whom this message is meant. How could you be so cunning as to make a poor, simple-minded and unsuspecting girl betray the cause of her country ? "

I consoled my poor Sophie as best I might, and I assured her that it was no reproach to her that she should be outwitted by so old a campaigner and so shrewd a man as myself. But it was no time now for talk. This message made it clear that the corn was indeed at Minsk, and that there were no troops there to defend it. I gave a hurried order from the window, the trumpeter blew the assembly, and in ten minutes we had left the village behind us and were riding hard for the city, the gilded domes and minarets of which glimmered above the snow of the horizon. Higher they rose and higher, until at last, as the sun sank towards the west, we were in the broad main street, and galloped up it amid the shouts of the moujiks and the cries of frightened women until we found ourselves in front of the great town-hall. My cavalry I drew up in the square, and I, with my two sergeants, Oudin and Papilette, rushed into the building.

Heavens ! shall I ever forget the sight which greeted us ? Right in front of us was drawn up a triple line of Russian grenadiers. Their muskets rose as we entered and a crashing volley burst into our very faces, Oudin

and Papilette dropped upon the floor, riddled with bullets. For myself, my busby was shot away and I had two holes through my dolman. The grenadiers ran at me with their bayonets. "Treason!" I cried. "We are betrayed! Stand to your horses!" I rushed out of the hall, but the whole square was swarming with troops. From every side street dragoons and Cossacks were riding down upon us, and such a rolling fire had burst from the surrounding houses that half my men and horses were on the ground. "Follow me!" I yelled, and sprang upon Violette, but a giant of a Russian dragoon officer threw his arms round me, and we rolled on the ground together. He shortened his sword to kill me, but, changing his mind, he seized me by the throat and banged my head against the stones until I was unconscious. So it was that I became the prisoner of the Russians.

When I came to myself my only regret was that my captor had not beaten out my brains. There in the grand square of Minsk lay half my troopers dead or wounded, with exultant crowds of Russians gathered round them. The rest, in a melancholy group, were herded into the porch of the town-hall, a sotnia of Cossacks keeping guard over them. Alas! what could I say, what could I do? It was evident that I had led my men into a carefully baited trap. They had heard of our mission, and they had prepared for us. And yet there was that despatch which had caused me to neglect all precautions and to ride straight into the town. How was I to account for that? The tears ran down my cheeks as I surveyed the ruin of my squadron, and as I thought of the plight of my comrades of the Grand Army who awaited the food which I was to have brought them. Ney had trusted me, and I had failed him. How often he would strain his eyes over the snowfields for that convoy of grain which should never gladden his sight! My own fate was hard enough. An exile in Siberia was the best which the future could bring me. But you will believe me, my friends, that it

was not for his own sake, but for that of his starving comrades, that Étienne Gerard's cheeks were lined by his tears, frozen even as they were shed.

" What's this ? " said a gruff voice at my elbow ; and I turned to face the huge, black-bearded dragoon who had dragged me from my saddle. " Look at the Frenchman crying ! I thought that the Corsican was followed by brave men, and not by children."

" If you and I were face to face and alone, I should let you see which is the better man," said I.

For answer the brute struck me across the face with his open hand. I seized him by the throat, but a dozen of his soldiers tore me away from him, and he struck me again while they held my hands.

" You base hound," I cried, " is this the way to treat an officer and a gentleman ? "

" We never asked you to come to Russia," said he. " If you do you must take such treatment as you can get. I would shoot you off-hand if I had my way."

" You will answer for this some day," I cried, as I wiped the blood from my moustache.

" If the Hetman Platoff is of my way of thinking you will not be alive this time to-morrow," he answered, with a ferocious scowl. He added some words in Russian to his troops, and instantly they all sprang to their saddles. Poor Violette, looking as miserable as her master, was led round and I was told to mount her. My left arm was tied with a thong which was fastened to the stirrup-iron of a sergeant of dragoons. So in most sorry plight I and the remnant of my men set forth from Minsk.

Never have I met such a brute as this man Sergine, who commanded the escort. The Russian army contains the best and the worst in the world, but a worse than Major Sergine of the Dragoons of Kieff I have never seen in any force outside of the guerillas of the Peninsula. He was a man of great stature, with a fierce, hard face and a bristling black beard, which fell over his cuirass. I have been told since that he was noted for his strength and his

bravery, and I could answer for it that he had the grip of a bear, for I had felt it when he tore me from my saddle. He was a wit, too, in his way, and made continual remarks in Russian at our expense which set all his dragoons and Cossacks laughing. Twice he beat my comrades with his riding-whip, and once he approached me with the lash swung over his shoulder, but there was something in my eyes which prevented it from falling. So in misery and humiliation, cold and starving, we rode in a disconsolate column across the vast snow-plain. The sun had sunk, but still in the long northern twilight we pursued our weary journey. Numbed and frozen, with my head aching from the blows it had received, I was borne onwards by Violette, hardly conscious of where I was or whither I was going. The little mare walked with a sunken head, only raising it to snort her contempt for the mangy Cossack ponies who were round her.

But suddenly the escort stopped, and I found that we had halted in the single street of a small Russian village. There was a church on one side, and on the other was a large stone house, the outline of which seemed to me to be familiar. I looked around me in the twilight, and then I saw that we had been led back to Dobrova, and that this house at the door of which we were waiting was the same house of the priest at which we had stopped in the morning. Here it was that my charming Sophie in her innocence had translated the unlucky message which had in some strange way led us to our ruin. To think that only a few hours before we had left this very spot with such high hopes and all fair prospects for our mission, and now the remnants of us waited as beaten and humiliated men for whatever lot a brutal enemy might ordain ! But such is the fate of the soldier, my friends—kisses to-day, blows to-morrow, Tokay in a palace, ditch-water in a hovel, furs or rags, a full purse or an empty pocket, ever swaying from the best to the worst, with only his courage and his honour unchanging.

The Russian horsemen dismounted, and my poor

fellows were ordered to do the same. It was already late, and it was clearly their intention to spend the night in this village. There were great cheering and joy amongst the peasants when they understood that we had all been taken, and they flocked out of their houses with flaming torches, the women carrying out tea and brandy for the Cossacks. Amongst others, the old priest came forth—the same whom we had seen in the morning. He was all smiles now, and he bore with him some hot punch on a salver, the reek of which I can remember still. Behind her father was Sophie. With horror I saw her clasp Major Sergine's hand as she congratulated him upon the victory he had won and the prisoners he had made. The old priest, her father, looked at me with an insolent face, and made insulting remarks at my expense, pointing at me with his lean and grimy hand. His fair daughter Sophie looked at me also, but she said nothing, and I could read her tender pity in her dark eyes. At last she turned to Major Sergine and said something to him in Russian, on which he frowned and shook his head impatiently. She appeared to plead with him, standing there in the flood of light which shone from the open door of her father's house. My eyes were fixed upon the two faces, that of the beautiful girl and of the dark, fierce man, for my instinct told me that it was my own fate which was under debate. For a long time the soldier shook his head, and then, at last softening before her pleadings, he appeared to give way. He turned to where I stood with my guardian sergeant beside me.

"These good people offer you the shelter of their roof for the night," said he to me, looking me up and down with vindictive eyes. "I find it hard to refuse them, but I tell you straight that for my part I had rather see you on the snow. It would cool your hot blood, you rascal of a Frenchman!"

I looked at him with the contempt that I felt.

"You were born a savage, and you will die one," said I.

My words stung him, for he broke into an oath, raising his whip as if he would strike me.

" Silence, you crop-eared dog ! " he cried. " Had I my way some of the insolence would be frozen out of you before morning." Mastering his passion, he turned upon Sophie with what he meant to be a gallant manner. " If you have a cellar with a good lock," said he, " the fellow may lie in it for the night, since you have done him the honour to take an interest in his comfort. I must have his parole that he will not attempt to play us any tricks, as I am answerable for him until I hand him over to the Hetman Platoff to-morrow."

His supercilious manner was more than I could endure. He had evidently spoken French to the lady in order that I might understand the humiliating way in which he referred to me.

" I will take no favour from you," said I. " You may do what you like, but I will never give you my parole."

The Russian shrugged his great shoulders, and turned away as if the matter were ended.

" Very well, my fine fellow, so much the worse for your fingers and toes. We shall see how you are in the morning after a night in the snow."

" One moment, Major Sergine," cried Sophie. " You must not be so hard upon this prisoner. There are some special reasons why he has a claim upon our kindness and mercy."

The Russian looked with suspicion upon his face from her to me.

" What are the special reasons ? You certainly seem to take a remarkable interest in this Frenchman," said he.

" The chief reason is that he has this very morning of his own accord released Captain Alexis Barakoff, of the Dragoons of Grodno."

" It is true," said Barakoff, who had come out of the house. " He captured me this morning, and he released me upon parole rather than take me back to the French army, where I should have been starved."

"Since Colonel Gerard has acted so generously you will surely, now that fortune has changed, allow us to offer him the poor shelter of our cellar upon this bitter night," said Sophie. "It is a small return for his generosity."

But the dragoon was still in the sulks.

"Let him give me his parole first that he will not attempt to escape," said he. "Do you hear, sir? Do you give me your parole?"

"I give you nothing," said I.

"Colonel Gerard," cried Sophie, turning to me with a coaxing smile, "you will give *me* your parole, will you not?"

"To you, mademoiselle, I can refuse nothing. I will give you my parole, with pleasure."

"There, Major Sergine," cried Sophie, in triumph, "that is surely sufficient. You have heard him say that he gives me his parole. I will be answerable for his safety."

In an ungracious fashion my Russian bear grunted his consent, and so I was led into the house, followed by the scowling father and by the big, black-bearded dragoon. In the basement there was a large and roomy chamber, where the winter logs were stored. Thither it was that I was led, and I was given to understand that this was to be my lodging for the night. One side of this bleak apartment was heaped up to the ceiling with faggots of firewood. The rest of the room was stone-flagged and bare-walled, with a single, deep-set window upon one side, which was safely guarded with iron bars. For light I had a large stable lantern, which swung from a beam of the low ceiling. Major Sergine smiled as he took this down, and swung it round so as to throw its light into every corner of that dreary chamber.

"How do you like our Russian hotels, monsieur?" he asked, with his hateful sneer. "They are not very grand, but they are the best that we can give you. Perhaps the next time that you Frenchmen take a fancy to

travel you will choose some other country where they will make you more comfortable." He stood laughing at me, his white teeth gleaming through his beard. Then he left me, and I heard the great key creak in the lock.

For an hour of utter misery, chilled in body and soul, I sat upon a pile of faggots, my face sunk upon my hands and my mind full of the saddest thoughts. It was cold enough within those four walls, but I thought of the sufferings of my poor troopers outside, and I sorrowed with their sorrow. Then I paced up and down, and I clapped my hands together and kicked my feet against the walls to keep them from being frozen. The lamp gave out some warmth, but still it was bitterly cold, and I had had no food since morning. It seemed to me that everyone had forgotten me, but at last I heard the key turn in the lock, and who should enter but my prisoner of the morning, Captain Alexis Barakoff. A bottle of wine projected from under his arm, and he carried a great plate of hot stew in front of him.

"Hush!" said he; "not a word! Keep up your heart! I cannot stop to explain, for Sergine is still with us. Keep awake and ready!" With these hurried words he laid down the welcome food and ran out of the room.

"Keep awake and ready!" The words rang in my ears. I ate my food and I drank my wine, but it was neither food nor wine which had warmed the heart within me. What could those words of Barakoff mean? Why was I to remain awake? For what was I to be ready? Was it possible that there was a chance yet of escape? I have never respected the man who neglects his prayers at all other times and yet prays when he is in peril. It is like a bad soldier who pays no respect to the colonel save when he would demand a favour of him. And yet when I thought of the salt-mines of Siberia on the one side and of my mother in France upon the other, I could not help a prayer rising not from my lips, but from my heart,

that the words of Barakoff might mean all that I hoped. But hour after hour struck upon the village clock, and still I heard nothing save the call of the Russian sentries in the street outside.

Then at last my heart leaped within me, for I heard a light step in the passage. An instant later the key turned, the door opened, and Sophie was in the room.

"Monsieur——" she cried.

"Étienne," said I.

"Nothing will change you," said she. "But is it possible that you do not hate me? Have you forgiven me the trick which I played you?"

"What trick?" I asked.

"Good heavens! is it possible that even now you have not understood it? You asked me to translate the despatch. I have told you that it meant, 'If the French come to Minsk all is lost.'"

"What did it mean, then?"

"It means, 'Let the French come to Minsk. We are awaiting them.'"

I sprang back from her.

"You betrayed me!" I cried. "You lured me into this trap. It is to you that I owe the death and capture of my men. Fool that I was to trust a woman!"

"Do not be unjust, Colonel Gerard. I am a Russian woman, and my first duty is to my country. Would you not wish a French girl to have acted as I have done? Had I translated the message correctly you would not have gone to Minsk and your squadron would have escaped. Tell me that you forgive me!"

She looked bewitching as she stood pleading her cause in front of me. And yet, as I thought of my dead men, I could not take the hand which she held out to me.

"Very good," said she, as she dropped it by her side. "You feel for your own people and I feel for mine, and so we are equal. But you have said one wise and kindly thing within these walls, Colonel Gerard. You have said, 'One man more or less can make no difference in a

struggle between two great armies.' Your lesson of nobility is not wasted. Behind those faggots is an unguarded door. Here is the key to it. Go forth, Colonel Gerard, and I trust that we may never look upon each other's face again."

I stood for an instant with the key in my hand and my head in a whirl. Then I handed it back to her.

"I cannot do it," I said.

"Why not?"

"I have given my parole."

"To whom?" she asked.

"Why, to you."

"And I release you from it."

My heart bounded with joy. Of course, it was true what she said. I had refused to give my parole to Sergine. I owed him no duty. If she relieved me from my promise my honour was clear. I took the key from her hand.

"You will find Captain Barakoff at the end of the village street," she said. "We of the North never forget either an injury or a kindness. He has your mare and your sword waiting for you. Do not delay an instant, for in two hours it will be dawn."

So I passed out into the starlit Russian night, and had that last glimpse of Sophie as she peered after me through the open door. She looked wistfully at me as if she expected something more than the cold thanks which I gave her, but even the humblest man has his pride, and I will not deny that mine was hurt by the deception which she had played upon me. I could not have brought myself to kiss her hand, far less her lips. The door led into a narrow alley, and at the end of it stood a muffled figure who held Violette by the bridle.

"You told me to be kind to the next French officer whom I found in distress," said he. "Good luck! Bon voyage!" he whispered, as I bounded into the saddle. "Remember, 'Poltava' is the watchword."

It was well that he had given it to me, for twice I had

to pass Cossack pickets before I was clear of the lines. I had just ridden past the last vedettes and hoped that I was a free man again when there was a soft thudding in the snow behind me, and a heavy man upon a great black horse came swiftly after me. My first impulse was to put spurs to Violette. My second, as I saw a long black beard against a steel cuirass, was to halt and await him.

"I thought that it was you, you dog of a Frenchman," he cried, shaking his drawn sword at me. "So you have broken your parole, you rascal?"

"I gave no parole."

"You lie, you hound!"

I looked around and no one was coming. The vedettes were motionless and distant. We were all alone, with the moon above and the snow beneath. Fortune has ever been my friend.

"I gave you no parole."

"You gave it to the lady."

"Then I will answer for it to the lady."

"That would suit you better, no doubt. But, unfortunately, you will have to answer for it to me."

"I am ready."

"Your sword, too! There is treason in this! Ah, I see it all! The woman has helped you. She shall see Siberia for this night's work."

The words were his death-warrant. For Sophie's sake I could not let him go back alive. Our blades crossed, and an instant later mine was through his black beard and deep in his throat. I was on the ground almost as soon as he, but the one thrust was enough. He died, snapping his teeth at my ankles like a savage wolf.

Two days later I had rejoined the army at Smolensk, and was a part once more of that dreary procession which tramped onwards through the snow, leaving a long weal of blood to show the path which it had taken.

Enough, my friends; I would not reawaken the memory of those days of misery and death. They still come to haunt me in my dreams. When we halted at

last in Warsaw, we had left behind us our guns, our transport, three-fourths of our comrades. But we did not leave behind us the honour of Étienne Gerard. They have said that I broke my parole. Let them beware how they say it to my face, for the story is as I tell it, and old as I am my forefinger is not too weak to press a trigger when my honour is in question.

7. *How the Brigadier bore himself at Waterloo*

I—The Story of the Forest Inn

OF all the great battles in which I had the honour of drawing my sword for the Emperor and for France there was not one which was lost. At Waterloo, although, in a sense, I was present, I was unable to fight, and the enemy was victorious. It is not for me to say that there is a connection between these two things. You know me too well, my friends, to imagine that I would make such a claim. But it gives matter for thought, and some have drawn flattering conclusions from it. After all, it was only a matter of breaking a few English squares and the day would have been our own. If the Hussars of Conflans, with Étienne Gerard to lead them, could not do this, then the best judges are mistaken. But let that pass. The Fates had ordained that I should hold my hand and that the Empire should fall. But they had also ordained that this day of gloom and sorrow should bring such honour to me as had never come when I swept on the wings of victory from Boulogne to Vienna. Never had I burned so brilliantly as at that supreme moment when the darkness fell upon all around me. You are aware that I was faithful to the Emperor in his adversity, and that I refused to sell my sword and my honour to the Bourbons. Never again was I to feel my war horse between my knees, never again to hear the

kettledrums and silver trumpets behind me as I rode in front of my little rascals. But it comforts my heart, my friends, and it brings the tears to my eyes, to think how great I was upon that last day of my soldier life, and to remember that of all the remarkable exploits which have won me the love of so many beautiful women, and the respect of so many noble men, there was none which, in splendour, in audacity, and in the great end which was attained, could compare with my famous ride upon the night of June 18th, 1815. I am aware that the story is often told at mess-tables and in barrack-rooms, so that there are few in the army who have not heard it, but modesty has sealed my lips, until now, my friends, in the privacy of these intimate gatherings, I an inclined to lay the true facts before you.

In the first place, there is one thing which I can assure you. In all his career Napoleon never had so splendid an army as that with which he took the field for that campaign. In 1813 France was exhausted. For every veteran there were five children—Marie Louises as we called them, for the Empress had busied herself in raising levies while the Emperor took the field. But it was very different in 1815. The prisoners had all come back—the men from the snows of Russia, the men from the dungeons of Spain, the men from the hulks in England. These were the dangerous men, veterans of twenty battles, longing for their old trade, and with hearts filled with hatred and revenge. The ranks were full of soldiers who wore two and three chevrons, every chevron meaning five years' service. And the spirit of these men was terrible. They were raging, furious, fanatical, adoring the Emperor as a Mameluke does his prophet, ready, to fall upon their own bayonets if their blood could serve him. If you had seen these fierce old veterans going into battle, with their flushed faces, their savage eyes, their furious yells, you would wonder that anything could stand against them. So high was the spirit of France at that time that every other spirit would have quailed before

it; but these people, these English, had neither spirit nor soul, but only solid, immovable beef, against which we broke ourselves in vain. That was it, my friends! On the one side, poetry, gallantry, self-sacrifice—all that is beautiful and heroic. On the other side, beef. Our hopes, our ideals, our dreams—all were shattered on that terrible beef of Old England.

You have read how the Emperor gathered his forces, and then how he and I, with a hundred and thirty thousand veterans, hurried to the northern frontier and fell upon the Prussians and the English. On the 16th of June Ney held the English in play at Quatre Bras while we beat the Prussians at Ligny. It is not for me to say how far I contributed to that victory, but it is well known that the Hussars of Conflans covered themselves with glory. They fought well, these Prussians, and eight thousand of them were left upon the field. The Emperor thought that he had done with them, as he sent Marshal Grouchy with thirty-two thousand men to follow them up and to prevent their interfering with his plans. Then, with nearly eighty thousand men, he turned upon these "Goddam" Englishmen. How much we had to avenge upon them, we Frenchmen—the guineas of Pitt, the hulks of Portsmouth, the invasion of Wellington, the perfidious victories of Nelson! At last the day of punishment seemed to have arisen.

Wellington had with him sixty-seven thousand men, but many of them were known to be Dutch and Belgian, who had no great desire to fight against us. Of good troops he had not fifty thousand. Finding himself in the presence of the Emperor in person with eighty thousand men, this Englishman was so paralysed with fear that he could neither move himself nor his army. You have seen the rabbit when the snake approaches. So stood the English upon the ridge of Waterloo. The night before, the Emperor, who had lost an aide-de-camp at Ligny, ordered me to join his staff, and I had left my hussars to the charge of Major Victor. I know not which of us was

the most grieved, they or I, that I should be called away upon the eve of battle ; but an order is an order, and a good soldier can but shrug his shoulders and obey. With the Emperor I rode across the front of the enemy's position on the morning of the 18th, he looking at them through his glass and planning which was the shortest way to destroy them. Soult was at his elbow, and Ney and Foy and others who had fought the English in Portugal and Spain. "Have a care, sire," said Soult, "the English infantry is very solid."

"You think them good soldiers because they have beaten you," said the Emperor, and we younger men turned away our faces and smiled. But Ney and Foy were grave and serious. All the time the English line, chequered with red and blue and dotted with batteries, was drawn up silent and watchful within a long musket-shot of us. On the other side of the shallow valley our own people, having finished their soup, were assembling for the battle. It had rained very heavily ; but at this moment the sun shone out and beat upon the French army, turning our brigades of cavalry into so many dazzling rivers of steel, and twinkling and sparkling on the innumerable bayonets of the infantry. At the sight of that splendid army, and the beauty and majesty of its appearance, I could contain myself no longer ; but, rising in my stirrups, I waved my busby and cried, "Vive l'Empereur!" a shout which growled and roared and clattered from one end of the line to the other, while the horsemen waved their swords and the footmen held up their shakos upon their bayonets. The English remained petrified upon their ridge. They knew that their hour had come.

And so it would have come if at that moment the word had been given and the whole army had been permitted to advance. We had but to fall upon them and to sweep them from the face of the earth. To put aside all question of courage, we were the more numerous, the older soldiers, and the better led. But the Emperor desired

to do all things in order, and he waited until the ground should be drier and harder, so that his artillery could manœuvre. So three hours were wasted, and it was eleven o'clock before we saw Jerome Buonaparte's columns advance upon our left and heard the crash of the guns which told that the battle had begun. The loss of those three hours was our destruction. The attack upon the left was directed upon a farmhouse which was held by the English Guards, and we heard the three loud shouts of apprehension which the defenders were compelled to utter. They were still holding out, and D'Erlon's corps was advancing upon the right to engage another portion of the English line, when our attention was called away from the battle beneath our noses to a distant portion of the field of action.

The Emperor had been looking through his glass to the extreme left of the English line, and now he turned suddenly to the Duke of Dalmatia, or Soult, as we soldiers preferred to call him.

"What is it, Marshal?" said he.

We all followed the direction of his gaze, some raising our glasses, some shading our eyes. There was a thick wood over yonder, then a long, bare slope, and another wood beyond. Over this bare strip between the two woods there lay something dark, like the shadow of a moving cloud.

"I think that they are cattle, sire," said Soult.

At that instant there came a quick twinkle from amid the dark shadow.

"It is Grouchy," said the Emperor, and he lowered his glass. "They are doubly lost, these English. I hold them in the hollow of my hand. They cannot escape me."

He looked round, and his eyes fell upon me.

"Ah! here is the prince of messengers," said he. "Are you well mounted, Colonel Gerard?"

I was riding my little Violette, the pride of the brigade. I said so.

"Then ride hard to Marshal Grouchy, whose troops you see over yonder. Tell him that he is to fall upon the left flank and rear of the English while I attack them in front. Together we shall crush them and not a man escape."

I saluted and rode off without a word, my heart dancing with joy that such a mission should be mine. I looked at that long, solid line of red and blue looming through the smoke of the guns, and I shook my fist at it as I went. "We shall crush them and not a man escape." They were the Emperor's words, and it was I, Étienne Gerard, who was to turn them into deeds. I burned to reach the Marshal, and for an instant I thought of riding through the English left wing, as being the shortest cut. I have done bolder deeds and come out safely, but I reflected that if things went badly with me and I was taken or shot the message would be lost and the plans of the Emperor miscarry. I passed in front of the cavalry therefore, past the chasseurs, the lancers of the guard, the carabineers, the horse grenadiers, and, lastly, my own little rascals, who followed me wistfully with their eyes. Beyond the cavalry the Old Guard was standing, twelve regiments of them, all veterans of many battles, sombre and severe, in long blue overcoats, and high bearskins from which the plumes had been removed. Each bore within the goat-skin knapsack upon his back the blue and white parade uniform which they would use for their entry into Brussels next day. As I rode past them I reflected that these men had never been beaten, and, as I looked at their weather-beaten faces and their stern and silent bearing, I said to myself that they never would be beaten. Great heavens, how little could I foresee what a few more hours would bring!

On the right of the Old Guard were the Young Guard and the 6th Corps of Lobau, and then I passed Jacquinot's Lancers and Marbot's Hussars, who held the extreme flank of the line. All these troops knew nothing of the corps which was coming towards them through the wood,

and their attention was taken up in watching the battle which raged upon their left. More than a hundred guns were thundering from each side, and the din was so great that of all the battles which I have fought I cannot recall more than half-a-dozen which were as noisy. I looked back over my shoulder, and there were two brigades of cuirassiers, English and French, pouring down the hill together, with the sword-blades playing over them like summer lightning. How I longed to turn Violette, and to lead my hussars into the thick of it! What a picture! Étienne Gerard with his back to the battle, and a fine cavalry action raging behind him. But duty is duty, so I rode past Marbot's vedettes and on in the direction of the wood, passing the village of Frishermont upon my left.

In front of me lay the great wood, called the Wood of Paris, consisting mostly of oak trees, with a few narrow paths leading through it. I halted and listened when I reached it; but out of its gloomy depths there came no blare of trumpet, no murmur of wheels, no tramp of horses to mark the advance of that great column which with my own eyes I had seen streaming towards it. The battle roared behind me, but in front all was as silent as that gravé in which so many brave men would shortly sleep. The sunlight was cut off by the arches of leaves above my head, and a heavy damp smell rose from the sodden ground. For several miles I galloped at such a pace as few riders would care to go with roots below and branches above. Then, at last, for the first time I caught a glimpse of Grouchy's advance guard. Scattered parties of hussars passed me on either side, but some distance off, among the trees. I heard the beating of a drum far away, and the low, dull murmur which an army makes upon the march. Any moment I might come upon the staff and deliver my message to Grouchy in person, for I knew well that on such a march a Marshal of France would certainly ride with the van of his army.

Suddenly the trees thinned in front of me, and I under-

stood with delight that I was coming to the end of the wood, whence I could see the army and find the Marshal. Where the track comes out from amid the trees there is a small cabaret, where woodcutters and waggoners drink their wine. Outside the door of this I reined up my horse for an instant while I took in the scene which was before me. Some few miles away I saw a second great forest, that of St. Lambert, out of which the Emperor had seen the troops advancing. It was easy to see, however, why there had been so long a delay in their leaving one wood and reaching the other, because between the two ran the deep defile of the Lasnes, which had to be crossed. Sure enough, a long column of troops—horse, foot and guns—was streaming down one side of it and swarming up the other, while the advance guard was already among the trees on either side of me. A battery of horse artillery was coming along the road, and I was about to gallop up to it and ask the officer in command if he could tell me where I should find the Marshal, when suddenly I observed that, though the gunners were dressed in blue. they had not the dolman trimmed with red brandenburgs as our own horse-gunners wear it. Amazed at the sight, I was looking at these soldiers to left and right when a hand touched my thigh, and there was the landlord, who had rushed from his inn.

"Madman!" he cried, "why are you here? What are you doing?"

"I am seeking Marshal Grouchy."

"You are in the heart of the Prussian army. Turn and fly!"

"Impossible; this is Grouchy's corps."

"How do you know?"

"Because the Emperor has said it."

"Then the Emperor has made a terrible mistake! I tell you that a patrol of Silesian hussars has this instant left me. Did you not see them in the wood?"

"I saw hussars."

"They are the enemy."

"Where is Grouchy?"

"He is behind. They have passed him."

"Then how can I go back? If I go forward I may see him yet. I must obey my orders and find him wherever he is."

The man reflected for an instant.

"Quick! quick!" he cried, seizing my bridle. "Do what I say and you may yet escape. They have not observed you yet. Come with me and I will hide you until they pass."

Behind his house there was a low stable, and into this he thrust Violette. Then he half led and half dragged me into the kitchen of the inn. It was a bare, brick-floored room. A stout, red-faced woman was cooking cutlets at the fire.

"What's the matter now?" she asked, looking with a frown from me to the innkeeper. "Who is this you have brought in?"

"It is a French officer, Marie. We cannot let the Prussians take him."

"Why not?"

"Why not? Sacred name of a dog, was I not myself a soldier of Napoleon? Did I not win a musket of honour among the Vélites of the Guard? Shall I see a comrade taken before my eyes? Marie, we must save him."

But the lady looked at me with most unfriendly eyes.

"Pierre Charras," she said, "you will not rest until you have your house burned over your head. Do you not understand, you blockhead, that if you fought for Napoleon it was because Napoleon ruled Belgium? He does so no longer. The Prussians are our allies and this is our enemy. I will have no Frenchman in this house. Give him up!"

The innkeeper scratched his head and looked at me in despair, but it was very evident to me that it was neither for France nor for Belgium that this woman cared,

but that it was the safety of her own house that was nearest her heart.

" Madame," said I, with all the dignity and assurance I could command, " the Emperor is defeating the English and the French army will be here before evening. If you have used me well you will be rewarded, and if you have denounced me you will be punished and your house will certainly be burned by the provost-marshal."

She was shaken by this, and I hastened to complete my victory by other methods.

" Surely," said I, " it is impossible that anyone so beautiful can also be hard-hearted ? You will not refuse me the refuge which I need."

She looked at my whiskers and I saw that she was softened. I took her hand, and in two minutes we were on such terms that her husband swore roundly that he would give me up himself if I pressed the matter farther.

" Besides, the road is full of Prussians," he cried. " Quick ! quick ! into the loft ! "

" Quick ! quick ! into the loft ! " echoed his wife, and together they hurried me towards a ladder which led to a trap-door in the ceiling. There was loud knocking at the door, so you can think that it was not long before my spurs went twinkling through the hole and the board was dropped behind me. An instant later I heard the voices of the Germans in the rooms below me.

The place in which I found myself was a single long attic, the ceiling of which was formed by the roof of the house. It ran over the whole of one side of the inn, and through the cracks in the flooring I could look down either upon the kitchen, the sitting-room or the bar at my pleasure. There were no windows, but the place was in the last stage of disrepair, and several missing slates upon the roof gave me light and the means of observation. The place was heaped with lumber—fodder at one end and a huge pile of empty bottles at the other. There was no door or window save the hole through which I had come up.

I sat upon the heap of hay for a few minutes to steady myself and to think out my plans. It was very serious that the Prussians should arrive upon the field of battle earlier than our reserves, but there appeared to be only one corps of them, and a corps more or less makes little difference to such a man as the Emperor. He could afford to give the English all this and beat them still. The best way in which I could serve him, since Grouchy was behind, was to wait here until they were past, and then to resume my journey, to see the Marshal, and to give him his orders. If he advanced upon the rear of the English instead of following the Prussians all would be well. The fate of France depended upon my judgment and my nerve. It was not the first time, my friends, as you are well aware, and you know the reasons that I had to trust that neither nerve nor judgment would ever fail me. Certainly, the Emperor had chosen the right man for his mission. "The prince of messengers" he had called me. I would earn my title.

It was clear that I could do nothing until the Prussians had passed, so I spent my time in observing them. I have no love for these people, but I am compelled to say that they kept excellent discipline, for not a man of them entered the inn, though their lips were caked with dust and they were ready to drop with fatigue. Those who had knocked at the door were bearing an insensible comrade, and having left him they returned at once to the ranks. Several others were carried in the same fashion and laid in the kitchen, while a young surgeon, little more than a boy, remained behind in charge of them. Having observed them through the cracks in the floor, I next turned my attention to the holes in the roof, from which I had an excellent view of all that was passing outside. The Prussian corps was still streaming past. It was easy to see that they had made a terrible march and had little food, for the faces of the men were ghastly, and they were plastered from head to foot with mud from their falls upon the foul and slippery roads. Yet, spent

as they were, their spirit was excellent, and they pushed and hauled at the gun-carriages when the wheels sank up to the axles in the mire and the weary horses were floundering knee-deep unable to draw them through. The officers rode up and down the column encouraging the more active with words of praise, and the laggards with blows from the flat of their swords. All the time from over the wood in front of them there came the tremendous roar of the battle, as if all the rivers on earth had united in one gigantic cataract, booming and crashing in a mighty fall. Like the spray of the cataract was the long veil of smoke which rose high over the trees. The officers pointed to it with their swords, and with hoarse cries from their parched lips the mud-stained men pushed onwards to the battle. For an hour I watched them pass, and I reflected that their vanguard must have come into touch with Marbot's vedettes and that the Emperor knew already of their coming. "You are going very fast up the road, my friends, but you will come down it a great deal faster," said I to myself, and I consoled myself with the thought.

But an adventure came to break the monotony of this long wait. I was seated beside my loophole and congratulating myself that the corps was nearly past, and that the road would soon be clear for my journey, when suddenly I heard a loud altercation break out in French in the kitchen.

"You shall not go!" cried a woman's voice.

"I tell you that I will!" said a man's, and there was a sound of scuffling.

In an instant I had my eye to the crack in the floor. There was my stout lady, like a faithful watch-dog, at the bottom of the ladder; whil· the young German surgeon, white with anger, was endeavouring to come up it. Several of the German soldiers who had recovered from their prostration were sitting about on the kitchen floor and watching the quarrel with stolid, but attentive, faces. The landlord was nowhere to be seen.

"There is no liquor there," said the woman.

"I do not want liquor; I want hay or straw for these men to lie upon. Why should they lie on the bricks when there is straw overhead?

"There is no straw."

"What is up there?"

"Empty bottles."

"Nothing else?"

"No."

For a moment it looked as if the surgeon would abandon his intention, but one of the soldiers pointed up to the ceiling. I gathered from what I could understand of his words that he could see the straw sticking out between the planks. In vain the woman protested. Two of the soldiers were able to get upon their feet and to drag her aside, while the young surgeon ran up the ladder, pushed open the trap-door, and climbed into the loft. As he swung the door back I slipped behind it, but as luck would have it he shut it again behind him, and there we were left standing face to face.

Never have I seen a more astonished young man.

"A French officer!" he gasped.

"Hush!" said I. "Hush! Not a word above a whisper." I had drawn my sword.

"I am not a combatant," he said; "I am a doctor. Why do you threaten me with your sword? I am not armed."

"I do not wish to hurt you, but I must protect myself. I am in hiding here."

"A spy!"

"A spy does not wear such a uniform as this, nor do you find spies on the staff of an army. I rode by mistake into the heart of this Prussian corps, and I concealed myself here in the hope of escaping when they are past. I will not hurt you if you do not hurt me, but if you do not swear that you will be silent as to my presence you will never go down alive from this attic."

"You can put up your sword, sir," said the surgeon,

and I saw a friendly twinkle in his eyes. "I am a Pole by birth, and I have no ill-feeling to you or your people. I will do my best for my patients, but I will do no more. Capturing hussars is not one of the duties of a surgeon. With your permission I will now descend with this truss of hay to make a couch for these poor fellows below."

I had intended to exact an oath from him, but it is my experience that if a man will not speak the truth he will not swear the truth, so I said no more. The surgeon opened the trap-door, threw out enough hay for his purpose, and then descended the ladder, letting down the door behind him. I watched him anxiously when he rejoined his patients, and so did my good friend the landlady, but he said nothing and busied himself with the needs of the soldiers.

By this time I was sure that the last of the army corps was past, and I went to my loop-hole confident that I should find the coast clear, save, perhaps, for a few stragglers, whom I could disregard. The first corps was indeed past, and I could see the last files of the infantry disappearing into the wood; but you can imagine my disappointment when out of the Forest of St. Lambert I saw a second corps emerging, as numerous as the first. There could be no doubt that the whole Prussian army, which we thought we had destroyed at Ligny, was about to throw itself upon our right wing while Marshal Grouchy had been coaxed away upon some fool's errand. The roar of guns, much nearer than before, told me that the Prussian batteries which had passed me were already in action. Imagine my terrible position! Hour after hour was passing; the sun was sinking towards the west. And yet this cursed inn, in which I lay hid, was like a little island amid a rushing stream of furious Prussians. It was all-important that I should reach Marshal Grouchy, and yet I could not show my nose without being made prisoner. You can think how I cursed and tore my hair. How little do we know what is in store for us! Even while I raged against my ill-fortune, that same fortune

was reserving me for a far higher task than to carry a message to Grouchy—a task which could not have been mine had I not been held tight in that little inn on the edge of the Forest of Paris.

Two Prussian corps had passed and a third was coming up, when I heard a great fuss and the sound of several voices in the sitting-room. By altering my position I was able to look down and see what was going on.

Two Prussian generals were beneath me, their heads bent over a map which lay upon the table. Several aides-de-camp and staff officers stood round in silence. Of the two generals one was a fierce old man, white-haired and wrinkled, with a ragged grizzled moustache and a voice like the bark of a hound. The other was younger, but long-faced and solemn. He measured distances upon the map with the air of a student, while his companion stamped and fumed and cursed like a corporal of hussars. It was strange to see the old man so fiery and the young one so reserved. I could not understand all that they said, but I was very sure about their general meaning.

"I tell you we must push on and ever on!" cried the old fellow, with a furious German oath. "I promised Wellington that I would be there with the whole army even if I had to be strapped to my horse. Bülow's corps is in action, and Zeithen's shall support it with every man and gun. Forwards, Gneisenau, forwards!"

The other shook his head.

"You must remember, your excellency, that if the English are beaten they will make for the coast. What will your position be then, with Grouchy between you and the Rhine?"

"We shall beat them, Gneisenau; the Duke and I will grind them to powder between us. Push on, I say! The whole war will be ended in one blow. Bring Pirsch up, and we can throw sixty thousand men into the scale while Thielmann holds Grouchy beyond Wavre."

Gneisenau shrugged his shoulders, but at that instant an orderly appeared at the door.

"An aide-de-camp from the Duke of Wellington," said he

"Ha, ha!" cried the old man; "let us hear what he has to say."

An English officer, with mud and blood all over his scarlet jacket, staggered into the room. A crimson-stained handkerchief was knotted round his arm, and he held the table to keep himself from faliing.

"My message is to Marshal Blucher," said he.

"I am Marshal Blucher. Go on! go on!" cried the impatient old man.

"The Duke bade me to tell you, sir, that the British army can hold its own, and that he has no fears for the result. The French cavalry has been destroyed, two of their divisions of infantry have ceased to exist, and only the Guard is in reserve. If you give us a vigorous support the defeat will be changed to absolute rout and——" His knees gave way under him, and he fell in a heap upon the floor.

"Enough! enough!" cried Blucher. "Gneisenau, send an aide-de-camp to Wellington and tell him to rely upon me to the full. Come on, gentlemen, we have our work to do!" He bustled eagerly out of the room, with all his staff clanking behind him, while two orderlies carried the English messenger to the care of the surgeon.

Gneisenau, the Chief of the Staff, had lingered behind for an instant, and he laid his hand upon one of the aides-de-camp. The fellow had attracted my attention, for I have always a quick eye for a fine man. He was tall and slender, the very model of a horseman; indeed, there was something in his appearance which made it not unlike my own. His face was dark and as keen as that of a hawk, with fierce black eyes under thick, shaggy brows, and a moustache which would have put him in the crack squadron of my hussars. He wore a green coat with white facings, and a horsehair helmet—a dragoon, as I conjectured, and as dashing a cavalier as one would wish to have at the end of one's sword-point.

"A word with you, Count Stein," said Gneisenau. "If the enemy are routed, but if the Emperor escapes, he will rally another army, and all will have to be done again. But if we can get the Emperor, then the war is indeed ended. It is worth a great effort and a great risk for such an object as that."

The young dragoon said nothing, but he listened attentively.

"Suppose the Duke of Wellington's words should prove to be correct, and the French army should be driven in utter rout from the field, the Emperor will certainly take the road back through Genappe and Charleroi as being the shortest to the frontier. We can imagine that his horses will be fleet, and that the fugitives will make way for him. Our cavalry will follow the rear of the beaten army, but the Emperor will be far away at the front of the throng."

The young dragoon inclined his head.

"To you, Count Stein, I commit the Emperor. If you take him your name will live in history. You have the reputation of being the hardest rider in our army. Do you choose such comrades as you may select—ten or a dozen should be enough. You are not to engage in the battle, nor are you to follow the general pursuit, but you are to ride clear of the crowd, reserving your energies for a nobler end. Do you understand me?"

Again the dragoon inclined his head. This silence impressed me. I felt that he was indeed a dangerous man.

"Then I leave the details in your own hands. Strike at no one except the highest. You cannot mistake the Imperial carriage, nor can you fail to recognise the figure of the Emperor. Now I must follow the Marshal. Adieu! If ever I see you again I trust that it will be to congratulate you upon a deed which will ring through Europe."

The dragoon saluted, and Gneisenau hurried from the room. The young officer stood in deep thought for a

few moments. Then he followed the Chief of the Staff. I looked with curiosity from my loophole to see what his next proceeding would be. His horse, a fine, strong chestnut with two white stockings, was fastened to the rail of the inn. He sprang into the saddle, and, riding to intercept a column of cavalry which was passing, he spoke to an officer at the head of the leading regiment. Presently, after some talk, I saw two hussars—it was a hussar regiment—drop out of the ranks and take up their position beside Count Stein. The next regiment was also stopped, and two lancers were added to his escort. The next furnished him with two dragoons, and the next with two cuirassiers. Then he drew his little group of horsemen aside, and he gathered them round him, explaining to them what they had to do. Finally the nine soldiers rode off together and disappeared into the Wood of Paris.

I need not tell you, my friends, what all this portended. Indeed, he had acted exactly as I should have done in his place. From each colonel he had demanded the two best horsemen in the regiment, and so he had assembled a band who might expect to catch whatever they should follow. Heaven help the Emperor if, without an escort, he should find them on his track !

And I, dear friends—imagine the fever, the ferment, the madness, of my mind ! All thought of Grouchy had passed away. No guns were to be heard to the east. He could not be near. If he should come up he would not now be in time to alter the event of the day. The sun was already low in the sky and there could not be more than two or three hours of daylight. My mission might be dismissed as useless. But here was another mission, more pressing, more immediate, a mission which meant the safety, and perhaps the life, of the Emperor. At all costs, through every danger, I must get back to his side. But how was I to do it ? The whole Prussian army was now between me and the French lines. They blocked every road, but they could not block the path of

duty when Étienne Gerard sees it lie before him. I could not wait longer. I must be gone.

There was but the one opening to the loft, and so it was only down the ladder that I could descend. I looked into the kitchen, and I found that the young surgeon was still there. In a chair sat the wounded English aide-de-camp, and on the straw lay two Prussian soldiers in the last stage of exhaustion. The others had all recovered and been sent on. These were my enemies, and I must pass through them in order to gain my horse. From the surgeon I had nothing to fear; the Englishman was wounded, and his sword stood with his cloak in a corner; the two Germans were half insensible, and their muskets were not beside them. What could be simpler? I opened the trap-door, slipped down the ladder, and appeared in the midst of them, my sword drawn in my hand.

What a picture of surprise! The surgeon, of course, knew all, but to the Englishman and the two Germans it must have seemed that the god of war in person had descended from the skies. With my appearance, with my figure, with my silver and grey uniform, and with that gleaming sword in my hand, I must indeed have been a sight worth seeing. The two Germans lay petrified, with staring eyes. The English officer half rose, but sat down again from weakness, his mouth open and his hand on the back of his chair.

"What the deuce!" he kept on repeating, "what the deuce!"

"Pray do not move," said I; "I will hurt no one, but woe to the man who lays hands upon me to stop me. You have nothing to fear if you leave me alone, and nothing to hope if you try to hinder me. I am Colonel Étienne Gerard, of the Hussars of Conflans."

"The deuce!" said the Englishman. "You are the man that killed the fox." A terrible scowl had darkened his face. The jealousy of sportsmen is a base passion. He hated me, this Englishman, because I had been before

him in transfixing the animal. How different are our natures! Had I seen him do such a deed I would have embraced him with cries of joy. But there was no time for argument.

"I regret it, sir," said I; "but you have a cloak here and I must take it."

He tried to rise from his chair and reach his sword, but I got between him and the corner where it lay.

"If there is anything in the pockets——"

"A case," said he.

"I would not rob you," said I; and raising the coat I took from the pockets a silver flask, a square wooden case and a field-glass. All these I handed to him. The wretch opened the case, took out a pistol, and pointed it straight at my head.

"Now, my fine fellow," said he, "put down your sword and give yourself up."

I was so astonished at this infamous action that I stood petrified before him. I tried to speak to him of honour and gratitude, but I saw his eyes fix and harden over the pistol.

"Enough talk!" said he. "Drop it!"

Could I endure such a humiliation? Death were better than to be disarmed in such a fashion. The word "Fire!" was on my lips when in an instant the Englishman vanished from before my face, and in his place was a great pile of hay, with a red-coated arm and two Hessian boots waving and kicking in the heart of it. Oh, the gallant landlady! It was my whiskers that had saved me.

"Fly, soldier, fly!" she cried, and she heaped fresh trusses of hay from the floor on to the struggling Englishman. In an instant I was out in the courtyard, had led Violette from her stable, and was on her back. A pistol bullet whizzed past my shoulder from the window, and I saw a furious face looking out at me. I smiled my contempt and spurred out into the road. The last of the Prussians had passed, and both my road and my duty lay

clear before me. If France won, all was well. If France lost, then on me and on my little mare depended that which was more than victory or defeat—the safety and the life of the Emperor. "On, Étienne, on!" I cried. "Of all your noble exploits, the greatest, even if it be the last, lies now before you!"

II—The Story of the Nine Prussian Horsemen

I told you when last we met, my friends, of the important mission from the Emperor to Marshal Grouchy, which failed through no fault of my own, and I described to you how during a long afternoon I was shut up in the attic of a country inn, and was prevented from coming out because the Prussians were all around me. You will remember also how I overheard the Chief of the Prussian Staff give his instructions to Count Stein, and so learned the dangerous plan which was on foot to kill or capture the Emperor in the event of a French defeat. At first I could not have believed in such a thing, but since the guns had thundered all day, and since the sound had made no advance in my direction, it was evident that the English had at least held their own and beaten off all our attacks.

I have said that it was a fight that day between the soul of France and the beef of England, but it must be confessed that we found the beef was very tough. It was clear that if the Emperor could not defeat the English when alone, then it might, indeed, go hard with him now that sixty thousand of these cursed Prussians were swarming on his flank. In any case, with this secret in my possesssion, my place was by his side.

I had made my way out of the inn in the dashing manner which I have described to you when last we met, and I left the English aide-de-camp shaking his foolish fist out of the window. I could not but laugh as I looked back at him, for his angry red face was framed and frilled with hay. Once out on the road I stood erect in

my stirrups, and I put on the handsome black riding-coat, lined with red, which had belonged to him. It fell to the top of my high boots, and covered my tell-tale uniform completely. As to my busby, there are many such in the German service, and there was no reason why it should attract attention. So long as no one spoke to me there was no reason why I should not ride through the whole of the Prussian army; but thcugh I understood German, for I had many friends among the German ladies during the pleasant years that I fought all over that country, still I spoke it with a pretty Parisian accent which could not be confounded with their rough, unmusical speech. I knew that this quality of my accent would attract attention, but I could only hope and pray that I would be permitted to go my way in silence.

The Forest of Paris was so large that it was useless to think of going round it, and so I took my courage in both hands and galloped on down the road in the track of the Prussian army. It was not hard to trace it, for it was rutted two feet deep by the gunwheels and the caissons. Soon I found a fringe of wounded men, Prussians and French, on each side of it, where Bülow's advance had come into touch with Marbot's Hussars. One old man with a long white beard, a surgeon, I suppose, shouted at me, and ran after me still shouting, but I never turned my head and took no notice of him save to spur on faster. I heard his shouts long after I had lost sight of him among the trees.

Presently I came up with the Prussian reserves. The infantry were leaning on their muskets or lying exhausted on the wet ground, and the officers stood in groups listening to the mighty roar of the battle and discussing the reports which came from the front. I hurried past at the top of my speed, but one of them rushed out and stood in my path with his hand up as a signal to me to stop. Five thousand Prussian eyes were turned upon me. There was a moment! You turn pale, my friends,

at the thought of it. Think how every hair upon me stood on end. But never for one instant did my wits or my courage desert me. "General Blucher!" I cried. Was it not my guardian angel who whispered the words in my ear! The Prussian sprang from my path, saluted and pointed forwards. They are well disciplined, these Prussians, and who was he that he should dare to stop the officer who bore a message to the general? It was a talisman that would pass me out of every danger, and my heart sang within me at the thought. So elated was I that I no longer waited to be asked, but as I rode through the army I shouted to right and left, "General Blucher! General Blucher!" and every man pointed me onwards and cleared a path to let me pass. There are times when the most supreme impudence is the highest wisdom. But discretion must also be used, and I must admit that I became indiscreet. For as I rode upon my way, ever nearer to the fighting line, a Prussian officer of Uhlans gripped my bridle and pointed to a group of men who stood near a burning farm. "There is Marshal Blucher. Deliver your message!" said he, and sure enough my terrible old grey-whiskered veteran was there within a pistol shot, his eyes turned in my direction.

But thé good guardian angel did not desert me. Quick as a flash there came into my memory the name of the general who commanded the advance of the Prussians. "General Bülow!" I cried. The Uhlan let go my bridle. "General Bülow! General Bülow!" I shouted as every stride of the dear little mare took me nearer my own people. Through the burning village of Plancenoit I galloped, spurred my way between two columns of Prussian infantry, sprang over a hedge, cut down a Silesian hussar who flung himself before me, and an instant afterwards, with my coat flying open to show the uniform below, I passed through the open files of the tenth of the line and was back in the heart of Lobau's corps once more. Outnumbered and outflanked, they were being slowly driven in by the pressure of the

Prussian advance. I galloped onwards, anxious only to find myself by the Emperor's side.

But a sight lay before me which held me fast as though I had been turned into some noble equestrian statue. I could not move, I could scarce breathe, as I gazed upon it. There was a mound over which my path lay, and as I came out on the top of it I looked down the long, shallow valley of Waterloo. I had left it with two great armies on either side and a clear field between them. Now there were but long, ragged fringes of broken and exhausted regiments upon the two ridges, but a real army of dead and wounded lay between. For two miles in length and half a mile across the ground was strewed and heaped with them. But slaughter was no new sight to me, and it was not that which held me spell-bound. It was that up the long slope of the British position was moving a walking forest—black, tossing, waving, unbroken. Did I not know the bearskins of the Guard? And did I not also know, did not my soldier's instinct tell me, that it was the last reserve of France; that the Emperor, like a desperate gamester, was staking all upon his last card? Up they went and up—grand, solid, unbreakable, scourged with musketry, riddled with grape, flowing onwards in a black, heavy tide, which lapped over the British batteries. With my glass I could see the English gunners throw themselves under their pieces or run to the rear. On rolled the crest of the bearskins, and then, with a crash which was swept across to my ears, they met the British infantry. A minute passed, and another, and another. My heart was in my mouth. They swayed back and forwards; they no longer advanced; they were held. Great Heaven! was it possible that they were breaking? One black dot ran down the hill, then two, then four, then ten, than a great, scattered, struggling mass, halting, breaking, halting and at last shredding out and rushing madly downwards.

"The Guard is beaten! The Guard is beaten!" From all around me I heard the cry. Along the whole line the

infantry turned their faces and the gunners flinched from their guns.

"The Old Guard is beaten! The Guard retreats!" An officer with a livid face passed me yelling out these words of woe. "Save yourselves! Save yourselves! You are betrayed!" cried another. "Save yourselves! Save yourselves!" Men were rushing madly to the rear, blundering and jumping like frightened sheep. Cries and screams rose from all around me. And at that moment, as I looked at the British position, I saw what I can never forget. A single horseman stood out black and clear upon the ridge against the last red angry glow of the setting sun. So dark, so motionless against that grim light, he might have been the very spirit of Battle brooding over that terrible valley. As I gazed he raised his hat high in the air, and at the signal, with a low, deep roar like a breaking wave, the whole British army flooded over their ridge and came rolling down into the valley. Long steel-fringed lines of red and blue, sweeping waves of cavalry, horse batteries rattling and bounding—down they came on to our crumbling ranks. It was over. A yell of agony, the agony of brave men who see no hope, rose from one flank to the other, and in an instant the whole of that noble army was swept in a wild, terror-stricken crowd from the field. Even now, dear friends, I cannot, as you see, speak of that dreadful moment with a dry eye or with a steady voice.

At first I was carried away in that wild rush, whirled off like a straw in a flooded gutter. But, suddenly, what should I see amongst the mixed regiments in front of me but a group of stern horsemen, in silver and grey, with a broken and tattered standard held aloft in the heart of them. Not all the might of England and of Prussia could break the Hussars of Conflans. But when I joined them it made my heart bleed to see them. The major, seven captains, and five hundred men were left upon the field. Young Captain Sabbatier was in command, and when I asked him where were the five missing squadrons he

pointed back and answered : " You will find them round one of those British squares." Men and horses were at their last gasp, caked with sweat and dirt, their black tongues hanging out from their lips ; but it made me thrill with pride to see how that shattered remnant still rode knee to knee, with every man, from the boy trumpeter to the farrier-sergeant, in his own proper place. Would that I could have brought them on with me as an escort for the Emperor ! In the heart of the Hussars of Conflans he would be safe indeed. But the horses were too spent to trot. I left them behind me with orders to rally upon the farmhouse of St. Aunay, where we had camped two nights before. For my own part I forced my horse through the throng in search of the Emperor.

There were things which I saw then, as I pressed through that dreadful crowd, which can never be banished from my mind. In evil dreams there comes back to me the memory of that flowing stream of livid, staring, screaming faces upon which I looked down. It was a nightmare. In victory one does not understand the horror of war. It is only in the cold chill of defeat that it is brought home to you. I remember an old Grenadier of the Guard lying at the side of the road with his broken leg doubled at a right angle. " Comrades, comrades, keep off my leg ! " he cried, but they tripped and stumbled over him all the same. In front of me rode a lancer officer without his coat. His arm had just been taken off in the ambulance. The bandages had fallen. It was horrible. Two gunners tried to drive through with their gun. A chasseur raised his musket and shot one of them through the head. I saw a major of cuirassiers draw his two holster pistols and shoot first his horse and then himself. Beside the road a man in a blue coat was raging and raving like a madman. His face was black with powder, his clothes were torn, one epaulette was gone, the other hung dangling over his breast. Only when I came close to him did I recognise that it was Marshal Ney. He howled at the flying troops

and his voice was hardly human. Then he raised the stump of his sword—it was broken three inches from the hilt. "Come and see how a Marshal of France can die!" he cried. Gladly would I have gone with him, but my duty lay elsewhere. He did not, as you know, find the death he sought, but he met it a few weeks later in cold blood at the hands of his enemies.

There is an old proverb that in attack the French are more than men, in defeat they are less than women. I knew that it was true that day. But even in that rout I saw things which I can tell with pride. Through the fields which skirt the road moved Cambronne's three reserve battalions of the Guard, the cream of our army. They walked slowly in square, their colours waving over the sombre lines of the bearskins. All around them raged the English cavalry and the black Lancers of Brunswick, wave after wave thundering up, breaking with a crash, and recoiling in ruin. When last I saw them the English guns, six at a time, were smashing grape-shot through their ranks, and the English infantry were closing in upon three sides and pouring volleys into them; but still, like a noble lion with fierce hounds clinging to its flanks, the glorious remnant of the Guard, marching slowly, halting, closing up, dressing, moved majestically from their last battle. Behind them the Guards' battery of twelve-pounders was drawn up upon the ridge. Every gunner was in his place, but no gun fired. "Why do you not fire?" I asked the colonel as I passed. "Our powder is finished." "Then why not retire?" "Our appearance may hold them back for a little. We must give the Emperor time to escape." Such were the soldiers of France.

Behind this screen of brave men the others took their breath, and then went on in less desperate fashion. They had broken away from the road, and all over the country-side in the twilight I could see the timid, scattered, frightened crowd who ten hours before had formed the finest army that ever went down to battle. I with my

splendid mare was soon able to get clear of the throng, and just after I passed Genappe I overtook the Emperor with the remains of his Staff. Soult was with him still, and so were Drouot, Lobau and Bertrand, with five Chasseurs of the Guard, their horses hardly able to move. The night was falling, and the Emperor's haggard face gleamed white through the gloom as he turned it towards me.

"Who is that?" he asked.

"It is Colonel Gerard," said Soult.

"Have you seen Marshal Grouchy?"

"No, sire. The Prussians were between."

"It does not matter. Nothing matters now. Soult, I will go back."

He tried to turn his horse, but Bertrand seized his bridle. "Ah, sire," said Soult, "the enemy has had good fortune enough already." They forced him on among them. He rode in silence with his chin upon his breast, the greatest and the saddest of men. Far away behind us those remorseless guns were still roaring. Sometimes out of the darkness would come shrieks and screams and the low thunder of galloping hoofs. At the sound we would spur our horses and hasten onwards through the scattered troops. At last, after riding all night in the clear moonlight, we found that we had left both pursued and pursuers behind. By the time we passed over the bridge at Charleroi the dawn was breaking. What a company of spectres we looked in that cold, clear, searching light, the Emperor with his face of wax, Soult blotched with powder, Lobau dabbled with blood! But we rode more easily now and had ceased to glance over our shoulders, for Waterloo was more than thirty miles behind us. One of the Emperor's carriages had been picked up at Charleroi, and we halted now on the other side of the Sambre, and dismounted from our horses.

You will ask me why it was that during all this time I had said nothing of that which was nearest my heart, the

need for guarding the Emperor. As a fact, I had tried to speak of it both to Soult and to Lobau, but their minds were so overwhelmed with the disaster and so distracted by the pressing needs of the moment that it was impossible to make them understand how urgent was my message. Besides, during this long flight we had always had numbers of French fugitives beside us on the road, and, however demoralised they might be, we had nothing to fear from the attack of nine men. But now, as we stood round the Emperor's carriage in the early morning, I observed with anxiety that not a single French soldier was to be seen upon the long, white road behind us. We had outstripped the army. I looked round to see what means of defence were left to us. The horses of the Chasseurs of the Guard had broken down, and only one of them, a grey-whiskered sergeant, remained. There were Soult, Lobau and Bertrand; but for all their talents, I had rather, when it came to hard knocks, have a single quarter-master-sergeant of hussars at my side than the three of them put together. There remained the Emperor himself, the coachman and a valet of the household who had joined us at Charleroi—eight all told; but of the eight only two, the chasseur and I, were fighting soldiers who could be depended upon at a pinch. A chill came over me as I reflected how utterly helpless we were. At that moment I raised my eyes, and there were the nine Prussian horsemen coming over the hill.

On either side of the road at this point are long stretches of rolling plain, part of it yellow with corn and part of it rich grass land watered by the Sambre. To the south of us was a low ridge, over which was the road to France. Along this road the little group of cavalry was riding. So well had Count Stein obeyed his instructions that he had struck far to the south of us in his determination to get ahead of the Emperor. Now he was riding from the direction in which we were going—the last in which we could expect an enemy. When I caught that first glimpse of them they were still half a mile away.

"Sire!" I cried, "the Prussians!"

They all started and stared. It was the Emperor who broke the silence.

"Who says they are Prussians?"

"I do, sire—I, Étienne Gerard!"

Unpleasant news always made the Emperor furious against the man who broke it. He railed at me now in the rasping, croaking, Corsican voice which only made itself heard when he had lost his self-control.

"You were always a buffoon," he cried. "What do you mean, you numskull, by saying that they are Prussians? How could Prussians be coming from the direction of France? You have lost any wits that you ever possessed."

His words cut me like a whip, and yet we all felt towards the Emperor as an old dog does to its master. His kick is soon forgotten and forgiven. I would not argue or justify myself. At the first glance I had seen the two white stockings on the forelegs of the leading horse, and I knew well that Count Stein was on its back. For an instant the nine horsemen had halted and surveyed us. Now they put spurs to their horses, and with a yell of triumph they galloped down the road. They had recognised that their prey was in their power.

At that swift advance all doubt had vanished. "By heavens, sire, it is indeed the Prussians!" cried Soult. Lobau and Bertrand ran about the road like two frightened hens. The sergeant of chasseurs drew his sabre with a volley of curses. The coachman and the valet cried and wrung their hands. Napoleon stood with a frozen face, one foot on the step of the carriage. And I—ah, my friends, I was magnificent! What words can I use to do justice to my own bearing at that supreme instant of my life! So coldly alert, so deadly cool, so clear in brain and ready in hand. He had called me a numskull and a buffoon. How quick and how noble was my revenge! When his own wits failed him, it was Étienne Gerard who supplied the want.

To fight was absurd; to fly was ridiculous. The Emperor was stout, and weary to death. At the best he was never a good rider. How could he fly from these, the picked men of an army? The best horseman in Prussia was among them. But I was the best horseman in France. I, and only I, could hold my own with them. If they were on *my* track instead of the Emperor's, all might still be well. These were the thoughts which flashed so swiftly through my mind that in an instant I had sprung from the first idea to the final conclusion. Another instant carried me from the final conclusion to prompt and vigorous action. I rushed to the side of the Emperor, who stood petrified, with the carriage between him and our enemies. "Your coat, sire! your hat!" I cried. I dragged them off him. Never had he been so hustled in his life. In an instant I had them on and had thrust him into the carriage. The next I had sprung on to his famous white Arab and had ridden clear of the group upon the road.

You have already divined my plan; but you may well ask how could I hope to pass myself off as the Emperor. My figure is as you still see it, and his was never beautiful, for he was both short and stout. But a man's height is not remarked when he is in the saddle, and for the rest one had but to sit forward on the horse and round one's back and carry oneself like a sack of flour. I wore the little cocked hat and the loose grey coat with the silver star which was known to every child from one end of Europe to the other. Beneath me was the Emperor's own famous white charger. It was complete.

Already as I rode clear the Prussians were within two hundred yards of us. I made a gesture of terror and despair with my hands, and I sprang my horse over the bank which lined the road. It was enough. A yell of exultation and of furious hatred broke from the Prussians. It was the howl of starving wolves who scent their prey. I spurred my horse over the meadow-land and looked back under my arm as I rode. Oh, the glorious moment when

one after the other I saw eight horsemen come over the bank at my heels! Only one had stayed behind, and I heard shouting and the sounds of a struggle. I remembered my old sergeant of chasseurs, and I was sure that number nine would trouble us no more. The road was clear, and the Emperor free to continue his journey.

But now I had to think of myself. If I were overtaken the Prussians would certainly make short work of me in their disappointment. If it were so—if I lost my life—I should still have sold it at a glorious price. But I had hopes that I might shake them off. With ordinary horsemen upon ordinary horses I should have had no difficulty in doing so, but here both steeds and riders were of the best. It was a grand creature that I rode, but it was weary with its long night's work, and the Emperor was one of those riders who do not know know to manage a horse. He had little thought for them, and a heavy hand upon their mouths. On the other hand Stein and his men had come both far and fast. The race was a fair one.

So quick had been my impulse, and so rapidly had I acted upon it, that I had not thought enough of my own safety. Had I done so in the first instance I should, of course, have ridden straight back the way we had come, for so I should have met our own people. But I was off the road and had galloped a mile over the plain before this occurred to me. Then when I looked back I saw that the Prussians had spread out into a long line, so as to head me off from the Charleroi road. I could not turn back, but at least I could edge towards the north. I knew that the whole face of the country was covered with our flying troops, and that sooner or later I must come upon some of them.

But one thing I had forgotten—the Sambre. In my excitement I never gave it a thought until I saw it, deep and broad, gleaming in the morning sunlight. It barred my path, and the Prussians howled behind me. I galloped to the brink, but the horse refused the plunge.

I spurred him, but the bank was high and the stream deep. He shrank back trembling and snorting. The yells of triumph were louder every instant. I turned and rode for my life down the river bank. It formed a loop at this part, and I must get across somehow, for my retreat was blocked. Suddenly a thrill of hope ran through me, for I saw a house on my side of the stream and another on the farther bank. Where there are two such houses it usually means that there is a ford between them. A sloping path led to the brink, and I urged my horse down it. On he went, the water up to the saddle, the foam flying right and left. He blundered once and I thought we were lost, but he recovered and an instant later was clattering up the farther slope. As we came out I heard the splash behind me as the first Prussian took the water. There was just the breadth of the Sambre between us.

I rode with my head sunk between my shoulders in Napoleon's fashion, and I did not dare to look back for fear they should see my moustache. I had turned up the collar of the grey coat so as partly to hide it. Even now if they found out their mistake they might turn and overtake the carriage. But when once we were on the road I could tell by the drumming of their hoofs how far distant they were, and it seemed to me that the sound grew perceptibly louder, as if they were slowly gaining upon me. We were riding now up the stony and rutted lane which led from the ford. I peeped back very cautiously from under my arm and I perceived that my danger came from a single rider, who was far ahead of his comrades. He was a hussar, a very tiny fellow, upon a big black horse, and it was his light weight which had brought him into the foremost place. It is a place of honour ; but it is also a place of danger, as he was soon to learn. I felt the holsters, but, to my horror, there were no pistols. There was a field-glass in one and the other was stuffed with papers. My sword had been left behind with Violette. Had I only my own weapons and my

own little mare I could have played with these rascals. But I was not entirely unarmed. The Emperor's own sword hung to the saddle. It was curved and short, the hilt all crusted with gold—a thing more fitted to glitter at a review than to serve a soldier in his deadly need. I drew it, such as it was, and I waited my chance. Every instant the clink and clatter of the hoofs grew nearer. I heard the panting of the horse, and the fellow shouted some threat at me. There was a turn in the lane, and as I rounded it I drew up my white Arab on his haunches. As we spun round I met the Prussian hussar face to face. He was going too fast to stop, and his only chance was to ride me down. Had he done so he might have met his own death, but he would have injured me or my horse past all hope of escape. But the fool flinched as he saw me waiting, and flew past me on my right. I lunged over my Arab's neck and buried my toy sword in his side. It must have been the finest steel and as sharp as a razor, for I hardly felt it enter, and yet his blood was within three inches of the hilt. His horse galloped on and he kept his saddle for a hundred yards before he sank down with his face on the mane, and then dived over the side of the neck on to the road. For my own part, I was already at his horse's heels. A few seconds had sufficed for all that I have told.

I heard the cry of rage and vengeance which rose from the Prussians as they passed their dead comrade, and I could not but smile as I wondered what they could think of the Emperor as a horseman and a swordsman. I glanced back cautiously as before, and I saw that none of the seven men stopped. The fate of their comrade was nothing compared to the carrying out of their mission. They were as untiring and as remorseless as blood-hounds. But I had a good lead, and the brave Arab was still going well. I thought that I was safe. And yet it was at that very instant that the most terrible danger befell me. The lane divided, and I took the smaller of the two divisions because it was the more grassy and the

easier for the horse's hoofs. Imagine my horror when, riding through a gate, I found myself in a square of stables and farm-buildings, with no way out save that by which I had come ! Ah, my friends, if my hair is snowy white, have I not had enough to make it so ?

To retreat was impossible. I could hear the thunder of the Prussians' hoofs in the lane. I looked round me, and Nature has blessed me with that quick eye which is the first of gifts to any soldier, but most of all to a leader of cavalry. Between a long, low line of stables and the farmhouse there was a pig-sty. Its front was made of bars of wood four feet high ; the back was of stone, higher than the front. What was beyond I could not tell. The space between the front and the back was not more than a few yards. It was a desperate venture, and yet I must take it. Every instant the beating of those hurrying hoofs was louder and louder. I put my Arab at the pig-sty. She cleared the front beautifully, and came down with her forefeet upon the sleeping pig within, slipping forward upon her knees. I was thrown over the wall beyond, and fell upon my hands and face in a soft flower-bed. My horse was upon one side of the wall, I upon the other, and the Prussians were pouring into the yard. But I was up in an instant, and had seized the bridle of the plunging horse over the top of the wall. It was built of loose stones, and I dragged down a few of them to make a gap. As I tugged at the bridle and shouted the gallant creature rose to the leap, and an instant afterwards she was by my side and I with my foot on the stirrup.

An heroic idea had entered my mind as I mounted into the saddle. These Prussians, if they came over the pig-sty, could only come one at once, and their attack would not be formidable when they had not had time to recover from such a leap. Why should I not wait and kill them one by one as they came over ? It was a glorious thought. They would learn that Étienne Gerard was not a safe man to hunt. My hand felt for my sword, but

you can imagine my feelings, my friends, when I came upon an empty scabbard. It had been shaken out when the horse had tripped over that infernal pig. On what absurd trifles do our destinies hang—a pig on one side, Étienne Gerard on the other ! Could I spring over the wall and get the sword ? Impossible ! The Prussians were already in the yard. I turned my Arab and resumed my flight.

But for a moment it seemed to me that I was in a far worse trap than before. I found myself in the garden of the farmhouse, an orchard in the centre and flower-beds all round. A high wall surrounded the whole place. I reflected, however, that there must be some point of entrance, since every visitor could not be expected to spring over the pig-sty. I rode round the wall. As I expected, I came upon a door with a key upon the inner side. I dismounted, unlocked it, opened it, and there was a Prussian lancer sitting his horse within six feet of me.

For a moment we each stared at the other. Then I shut the door and locked it again. A crash and a cry came from the other end of the garden. I understood that one of my enemies had come to grief in trying to get over the pig-sty. How could I ever get out of this *cul-de-sac* ? It was evident that some of the party had galloped round, while some had followed straight upon my tracks. Had I my sword I might have beaten off the lancer at the door, but to come out now was to be butchered. And yet if I waited some of them would certainly follow me on foot over the pig-sty, and what could I do then ? I must act at once or I was lost. But it is at such moments that my wits are most active and my actions most prompt. Still leading my horse, I ran for a hundred yards by the side of the wall away from the spot where the lancer was watching. There I stopped, and with an effort I tumbled down several of the loose stones from the top of the wall. The instant I had done so I hurried back to the door. As I had expected, he

thought I was making a gap for my escape at that point, and I heard the thud of his horse's hoofs as he galloped to cut me off. As I reached the gate I looked back, and I saw a green-coated horseman, whom I knew to be Count Stein, clear the pig-sty and gallop furiously with a shout of triumph across the garden. "Surrender, your Majesty, surrender!" he yelled; "we will give you quarter!" I slipped through the gate, but had no time to lock it on the other side. Stein was at my very heels, and the lancer had already turned his horse. Springing upon my Arab's back, I was off once more with a clear stretch of grass land before me. Stein had to dismount to open the gate, to lead his horse through, and to mount again before he could follow. It was he that I feared rather than the lancer, whose horse was coarse-bred and weary. I galloped hard for a mile before I ventured to look back, and then Stein was a musket-shot from me, and the lancer as much again, while only three of the others were in sight. My nine Prussians were coming down to more manageable numbers, and yet one was too much for an unarmed man.

It had surprised me that during this long chase I had seen no fugitives from the army, but I reflected that I was considerably to the west of their line of flight, and that I must edge more towards the east if I wished to join them. Unless I did so it was probable that my pursuers, even if they could not overtake me themselves, would keep me in view until I was headed off by some of their comrades coming from the north. As I looked to the eastward I saw afar off a line of dust which stretched for miles across the country. This was certainly the main road along which our unhappy army was flying. But I soon had proof that some of our stragglers had wandered into these side tracks, for I came suddenly upon a horse grazing at the corner of a field, and beside him, with his back against the bank, his master, a French cuirassier, terribly wounded and evidently at the point of death. I sprang down, seized his long, heavy sword, and rode on with it.

Never shall I forget the poor man's face as he looked at me with his failing sight. He was an old, grey-moustached soldier, one of the real fanatics, and to him this last vision of his Emperor was like a revelation from on high. Astonishment, love, pride—all shone in his pallid face. He said something—I fear they were his last words—but I had no time to listen, and I galloped on my way.

All this time I had been on the meadowland, which was intersected in this part by broad ditches. Some of them could not have been less than from fourteen to fifteen feet, and my heart was in my mouth as I went at each of them, for a slip would have been my ruin. But whoever selected the Emperor's horses had done his work well. The creature, save when it balked on the bank of the Sambre, never failed me for an instant. We cleared everything in one stride. And yet we could not shake off those infernal Prussians. As I left each watercourse behind me I looked back with renewed hope, but it was only to see Stein on his white-legged chestnut flying over it as lightly as I had done myself. He was my enemy, but I honoured him for the way in which he carried himself that day.

Again and again I measured the distance which separated him from the next horseman. I had the idea that I might turn and cut him down, as I had the hussar, before his comrade could come to his help. But the others had closed up and were not far behind. I reflected that this Stein was probably as fine a swordsman as he was a rider, and that it might take me some little time to get the better of him. In that case the others would come to his aid and I should be lost. On the whole, it was wiser to continue my flight.

A road with poplars on either side ran across the plain from east to west. It would lead me towards the long line of dust which marked the French retreat. I wheeled my horse, therefore, and galloped down it. As I rode I saw a single house in front of me upon the right, with a

great bush hung over the door to mark it as an inn. Outside there were several peasants, but for them I cared nothing. What frightened me was to see the gleam of a red coat, which showed that there were British in the place. However, I could not turn and I could not stop, so there was nothing for it but to gallop on and to take my chance. There were no troops in sight, so these men must be stragglers or marauders, from whom I had little to fear. As I approached I saw that there were two of them sitting drinking on a bench outside the inn door. I saw them stagger to their feet, and it was evident that they were both very drunk. One stood swaying in the middle of the road. "It's Boney! So help me, it's Boney!" he yelled. He ran with his hands out to catch me, but luckily for himself his drunken feet stumbled and he fell on his face on the road. The other was more dangerous. He had rushed into the inn, and just as I passed I saw him run out with his musket in his hand. He dropped upon one knee, and I stooped forward over my horse's neck. A single shot from a Prussian or an Austrian is a small matter, but the British were at that time the best shots in Europe, and my drunkard seemed steady enough when he had a gun at his shoulder. I heard the crack and my horse gave a convulsive spring which would have unseated many a rider. For an instant I thought he was killed, but when I turned in my saddle I saw a stream of blood running down the off hind-quarter. I looked back at the Englishman, and the brute had bitten the end off another cartridge and was ramming it into his musket, but before he had it primed we were beyond his range. These men were foot-soldiers and could not join in the chase, but I heard them whooping and tally-hoing behind me as if I had been a fox. The peasants also shouted and ran through the fields flourishing their sticks. From all sides I heard cries, and everywhere were the rushing, waving figures of my pursuers. To think of the great Emperor being chivied over the country-side in this fashion! It made

me long to have these rascals within the sweep of my sword.

But now I felt that I was nearing the end of my course. I had done all that a man could be expected to do—some would say more—but at last I had come to a point from which I could see no escape. The horses of my pursuers were exhausted, but mine was exhausted and wounded also. It was losing blood fast, and we left a red trail upon the white, dusty road. Already his pace was slackening, and sooner or later he must drop under me. I looked back, and there were the five inevitable Prussians—Stein, a hundred yards in front, then a lancer, and then three others riding together. Stein had drawn his sword, and he waved it at me. For my own part I was determined not to give myself up. I would try how many of these Prussians I could take with me into the other world. At this supreme moment all the great deeds of my life rose in a vision before me, and I felt that this, my last exploit, was indeed a worthy close to such a career. My death would be a fatal blow to those who loved me, to my dear mother, to my hussars, to others who shall be nameless. But all of them had my honour and my fame at heart, and I felt that their grief would be tinged with pride when they learned how I had ridden and how I had fought upon this last day. Therefore I hardened my heart and, as my Arab limped more and more upon his wounded leg, I drew the great sword which I had taken from the cuirassier, and I set my teeth for my supreme struggle. My hand was in the very act of tightening the bridle, for I feared that if I delayed longer I might find myself on foot fighting against five mounted men. At that instant my eye fell upon something which brought hope to my heart and a shout of joy to my lips.

From a grove of trees in front of me there projected the steeple of a village church. But there could not be two steeples like that, for the corner of it had crumbled away or been struck by lightning, so that it was of a most fantastic shape. I had seen it only two days before, and

it was the church of the village of Gosselies. It was not the hope of reaching the village which set my heart singing with joy, but it was that I knew my ground now, and that farmhouse not half a mile ahead, with its gable end sticking out from amid the trees, must be that very farm of St. Aunay where we had bivouacked, and which I had named to Captain Sabbatier as the rendezvous of the Hussars of Conflans. There they were, my little rascals, if I could but reach them. With every bound my horse grew weaker. Each instant the sound of the pursuit grew louder. I heard a gust of crackling German oaths at my very heels. A pistol bullet sighed in my ears. Spurring frantically and beating my poor Arab with the flat of my sword I kept him at the top of his speed. The open gate of the farmyard lay before me. I saw the twinkle of steel within. Stein's horse's head was within ten yards of me as I thundered through. "To me, comrades! To me!" I yelled. I heard a buzz as when the angry bees swarm from their nest. Then my splendid white Arab fell dead under me, and I was hurled on to the cobble-stones of the yard, where I can remember no more.

Such was my last and most famous exploit, my dear friends; a story which rang through Europe and has made the name of Étienne Gerard famous in history. Alas! that all my efforts could only give the Emperor a few weeks more liberty, since he surrendered upon July 15th to the English. But it was not my fault that he was not able to collect the forces still waiting for him in France, and to fight another Waterloo with a happier ending. Had others been as loyal as I was the history of the world might have been changed, the Emperor would have preserved his throne, and such a soldier as I would not have been left to spend his life in planting cabbages or to while away his old age telling stories in a café. You ask me about the fate of Stein and the Prussian horsemen! Of the three who dropped upon the way I know nothing. One you will remember that I killed. There remained five, three of whom were cut down by my hussars, who,

for the instant, were under the impression that it was indeed the Emperor whom they were defending. Stein was taken, slightly wounded, and so was one of the Uhlans. The truth was not told to them, for we thought it best that no news, or false news, should get about as to where the Emperor was, so that Count Stein still believed that he was within a few yards of making that tremendous capture. "You may well love and honour your Emperor," said he, "for such a horseman and such a swordsman I have never seen." He could not understand why the young colonel of hussars laughed so heartily at his words—but he has learned since.

8. *The Last Adventure of the Brigadier*

I WILL tell you no more stories, my dear friends. It is said that man is like the hare, which runs in a circle and comes back to die at the point from which it started. Gascony has been calling to me of late. I see the blue Garonne winding among the vineyards and the bluer ocean towards which its waters sweep. I see the old town also, and the bristle of masts from the side of the long stone quay. My heart hungers for the breath of my native air and the warm glow of my native sun. Here in Paris are my friends, my occupations, my pleasures. There all who have known me are in their grave. And yet the south-west wind as it rattles on my windows seems always to be the strong voice of the motherland calling her child back to that bosom into which I am ready to sink. I have played my part in my time. The time has passed. I must pass also. Nay, dear friends, do not look sad, for what can be happier than a life completed in honour and made beautiful with friendship and love? And yet it is solemn also when a man approaches the end of the long road and sees the turning which leads him into the unknown. But the Emperor and all his Marshals have ridden round that

dark turning and passed into the beyond. My hussars, too—there are not fifty men who are not waiting yonder. I must go. But on this the last night I will tell you that which is more than a tale—it is a great historical secret. My lips have been sealed, but I see no reason why I should not leave behind me some account of this remarkable adventure, which must otherwise be entirely lost, since I, and only I of all living men, have a knowledge of the facts.

I will ask you to go back with me to the year 1821. In that year our great Emperor had been absent from us for six years, and only now and then from over the seas we heard some whisper which showed that he was still alive. You cannot think what a weight it was upon our hearts for us who loved him to think of him in captivity eating his giant soul out upon that lonely island. From the moment we rose until we closed our eyes in sleep the thought was always with us, and we felt dishonoured that he, our chief and master, should be so humiliated without our being able to move a hand to help him. There were many who would most willingly have laid down the remainder of their lives to bring him a little ease, and yet all that we could do was to sit and grumble in our cafés and stare at the map, counting up the leagues of water which lay between us. It seemed that he might have been in the moon for all that we could do to help him. But that was only because we were all soldiers and knew nothing of the sea.

Of course, we had our own little troubles to make us bitter, as well as the wrongs of our Emperor. There were many of us who had held high rank and would hold it again if he came back to his own. We had not found it possible to take service under the white flag of the Bourbons, or to take an oath which might turn our sabres against the man whom we loved. So we found ourselves with neither work nor money. What could we do save gather together and gossip and grumble, while those who had a little paid the score and those who had

nothing shared the bottle? Now and then, if we were lucky, we managed to pick a quarrel with one of the Garde du Corps, and if we left him on his back in the Bois we felt that we had struck a blow for Napoleon once again. They came to know our haunts in time, and they avoided them as if they had been hornets' nests.

There was one of these—the Sign of the Great Man—in the Rue Varennes, which was frequented by several of the more distinguished and younger Napoleonic officers. Nearly all of us had been colonels or aides-de-camp, and when any man of less distinction came among us we generally made him feel that he had taken a liberty. There were Captain Lepine, who had won the medal of honour at Leipzig; Colonel Bonnet, aide-de-camp to Macdonald; Colonel Jourdan, whose fame in the army was hardly second to my own; Sabbatier of my own hussars, Meunier of the Red Lancers, Le Breton of the Guards, and a dozen others. Every night we met and talked, played dominoes, drank a glass or two and wondered how long it would be before the Emperor would be back and we at the head of our regiments once more. The Bourbons had already lost any hold they ever had upon the country, as was shown a few years afterwards, when Paris rose against them and they were hunted for the third time out of France. Napoleon had but to show himself on the coast, and he would have marched without firing a musket to the capital, exactly as he had done when he came back from Elba.

Well, when affairs were in this state there arrived one night in February, in our café, a most singular little man. He was short but exceedingly broad, with huge shoulders, and a head which was a deformity, so large was it. His heavy brown face was scarred with white streaks in a most extraordinary manner, and he had grizzled whiskers such as seamen wear. Two gold ear-rings in his ears, and plentiful tattooing upon his hands and arms, told us also that he was of the sea before he introduced himself as Captain Fourneau, of the Emperor's navy. He had

letters of introduction to two of our number, and there could be no doubt that he was devoted to the cause. He won our respect, too, for he had seen as much fighting as any of us, and the burns upon his face were caused by his standing to his post upon the *Orient*, at the Battle of the Nile, until the vessel blew up underneath him. Yet he would say little about himself, but he sat in the corner of the café watching us all with a wonderfully sharp pair of eyes and listening intently to our talk.

One night I was leaving the café when Captain Fourneau followed me, and touching me on the arm he led me without saying a word for some distance until we reached his lodgings. "I wish to have a chat with you," said he, and so conducted me up the stair to his room. There he lit a lamp and handed me a sheet of paper which he took from an envelope in his bureau. It was dated a few months before from the Palace of Schönbrunn at Vienna. "Captain Fourneau is acting in the highest interests of the Emperor Napoleon. Those who love the Emperor should obey him without question—Marie Louise." That is what I read. I was familiar with the signature of the Empress, and I could not doubt that this was genuine.

"Well," said he, "are you satisfied as to my credentials?"

"Entirely."

"Are you prepared to take your orders from me?"

"This document leaves me no choice."

"Good! In the first place, I understand from something you said in the café that you can speak English?"

"Yes, I can."

"Let me hear you do so."

I said in English, "Whenever the Emperor needs the help of Étienne Gerard, I am ready night and day to give my life in his service." Captain Fourneau smiled.

"It is funny English," said he, "but still it is better than no English. For my own part I speak English like

an Englishman. It is all that I have to show for six years spent in an English prison. Now I will tell you why I have come to Paris. I have come in order to choose an agent who will help me in a matter which affects the interests of the Emperor. I was told that it was at the café of the Great Man that I would find the pick of his old officers, and that I could rely upon every man there being devoted to his interests. I studied you all, therefore, and I have come to the conclusion that you are the one who is most suited for my purpose."

I acknowledged the compliment. "What is it that you wish me to do?" I asked.

"Merely to keep me company for a few months," said he. "You must know that after my release in England I settled down there, married an English wife, and rose to command a small English merchant ship, in which I have made several voyages from Southampton to the Guinea coast. They look on me there as an Englishman. You can understand, however, that with my feelings about the Emperor I am lonely sometimes, and that it would be an advantage to me to have a companion who would sympathise with my thoughts. One gets very bored on these long voyages, and I would make it worth your while to share my cabin."

He looked hard at me with his shrewd grey eyes all the time that he was uttering this rigmarole, and I gave him a glance in return which showed him that he was not dealing with a fool. He took out a canvas bag full of money.

"There are a hundred pounds in gold in this bag," said he. "You will be able to buy some comforts for your voyage. I should recommend you to get them in Southampton, whence we will start in ten days. The name of the vessel is the *Black Swan*. I return to Southampton to-morrow, and I shall hope to see you in the course of the next week."

"Come now," said I, "tell me frankly what is the destination of our voyage?"

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" he answered. "We are bound for the Guinea coast of Africa."

"Then how can that be in the highest interests of the Emperor?" I asked.

"It is in his highest interests that you ask no indiscreet questions and I give no indiscreet replies," he answered, sharply. So he brought the interview to an end, and I found myself back in my lodgings with nothing save this bag of gold to show that this singular interview had indeed taken place.

There was every reason why I should see the adventure to a conclusion, and so within a week I was on my way to England. I passed from St. Malo to Southampton, and on inquiry at the docks I had no difficulty in finding the *Black Swan*, a neat little vessel of a shape which is called, as I learned afterwards, a brig. There was Captain Fourneau himself upon the deck, and seven or eight rough fellows hard at work grooming her and making her ready for sea. He greeted me and led me down to his cabin.

"You are plain Mr. Gerard now," said he, "and a Channel Islander. I would be obliged to you if you would kindly forget your military ways and drop your cavalry swagger when you walk up and down my deck. A beard, too, would seem more sailor-like than those moustaches."

I was horrified by his words, but, after all, there are no ladies on the high seas, and what did it matter? He rang for the steward.

"Gustav," said he, "you will pay every attention to my friend, Monsieur Étienne Gerard, who makes this voyage with us. This is Gustav Kerouan, my Breton steward," he explained, "and you are very safe in his hands——"

This steward, with his harsh face and stern eyes, looked a very warlike person for so peaceful an employment. I said nothing, however, though you may guess that I kept my eyes open. A berth had been prepared

for me next the cabin, which would have seemed comfortable enough had it not contrasted with the extraordinary splendour of Fourneau's quarters. He was certainly a most luxurious person, for his room was new-fitted with velvet and silver in a way which would have suited the yacht of a noble better than a little West African trader. So thought the mate, Mr. Burns, who could not hide his amusement and contempt whenever he looked at it. This fellow, a big, solid red-headed Englishman, had the other berth connected with the cabin. There was a second mate named Turner, who lodged in the middle of the ship, and there were nine men and one boy in the crew, three of whom, as I was informed by Mr. Burns, were Channel Islanders like myself. This Burns, the first mate, was much interested to know why I was coming with them.

"I come for pleasure," said I.

He stared at me.

"Ever been to the West Coast?" he asked.

I said that I had not.

"I thought not," said he. "You'll never come again for that reason, anyhow."

Some three days after my arrival we untied the ropes by which the ship was tethered and we set off upon our journey. I was never a good sailor, and I may confess that we were far out of sight of any land before I was able to venture upon deck. At last, however, upon the fifth day I drank the soup which the good Kerouan brought me, and I was able to crawl from my bunk and up the stair. The fresh air revived me, and from that time onwards I accommodated myself to the motion of the vessel. My beard had begun to grow also, and I have no doubt that I should have made as fine a sailor as I have a soldier had I chanced to be born to that branch of the service. I learned to pull the ropes which hoisted the sails, and also to haul round the long sticks to which they are attached. For the most part, however, my duties were to play écarté with Captain Fourneau, and to act as his

companion. It was not strange that he should need one, for neither of his mates could read nor write, though each of them was an excellent seaman. If our captain had died suddenly I cannot imagine how we should have found our way in that waste of waters, for it was only he who had the knowledge which enabled him to mark our place upon the chart. He had this fixed upon the cabin wall, and every day he put our course upon it so that we could see at a glance how far we were from our destination. It was wonderful how well he could calculate it, for one morning he said that we should see the Cape Verd light that very night, and there it was, sure enough, upon our left front the moment that darkness came. Next day, however, the land was out of sight, and Burns, the mate, explained to me that we should see no more until we came to our port in the Gulf of Biafra. Every day we flew south with a favouring wind, and always at noon the pin upon the chart was moved nearer and nearer to the African coast. I may explain that palm oil was the cargo which we were in search of, and that our own lading consisted of coloured cloths, old muskets and such other trifles as the English sell to the savages.

At last the wind which had followed us so long died away, and for several days we drifted about on a calm and oily sea under a sun which brought the pitch bubbling out between the planks upon the deck. We turned and turned our sails to catch every wandering puff, until at last we came out of this belt of calm and ran south again with a brisk breeze, the sea all round us being alive with flying fishes. For some days Burns appeared to be uneasy, and I observed him continually shading his eyes with his hand and staring at the horizon as if he were looking for land. Twice I caught him with his red head against the chart in the cabin, gazing at that pin, which was always approaching and yet never reaching the African coast. At last one evening, as Captain Fourneau and I were playing écarté in the cabin, the mate entered with an angry look upon his sunburned face.

"I beg your pardon, Captain Fourneau," said he. "But do you know what course the man at the wheel is steering?"

"Due south," the captain answered, with his eyes fixed upon his cards.

"And he should be steering due east."

"How do you make that out?"

The mate gave an angry growl.

"I may not have much education," said he, "but let me tell you this, Captain Fourneau. I've sailed these waters since I was a little nipper of ten, and I know the line when I'm on it, and I know the doldrums, and I know how to find my way to the oil rivers. We are south of the line now, and we should be steering due east instead of due south if your port is the port that the owners sent you to."

"Excuse me, Mr. Gerard. Just remember that it is my lead," said the captain, laying down his cards. "Come to the map here, Mr. Burns, and I will give you a lesson in practical navigation. Here is the trade wind from the south-west and here is the line, and here is the port that we want to make, and here is a man who will have his own way aboard his own ship." As he spoke he seized the unfortunate mate by the throat and squeezed him until he was nearly senseless. Kerouan, the steward, had rushed in with a rope, and between them they gagged and trussed the man, so that he was utterly helpless.

"There is one of our Frenchmen at the wheel. We had best put the mate overboard," said the steward.

"That is safest," said Captain Fourneau.

But that was more than I could stand. Nothing would persuade me to agree to the death of a helpless man. With a bad grace Captain Fourneau consented to spare him, and we carried him to the after-hold, which lay under the cabin. There he was laid among the bales of Manchester cloth.

"It is not worth while to put down the hatch," said

Captain Fourneau. "Gustav, go to Mr. Turner, and tell him that I would like to have a word with him."

The unsuspecting second mate entered the cabin, and was instantly gagged and secured as Burns had been. He was carried down and laid beside his comrade. The hatch was then replaced.

"Our hands have been forced by that red-headed dolt," said the captain, "and I have had to explode my mine before I wished. However, there is no great harm done, and it will not seriously disarrange my plans. Kerouan, you will take a keg of rum forward to the crew and tell them that the captain gives it to them to drink his health on the occasion of crossing the line. They will know no better. As to our own fellows, bring them down to your pantry so that we may be sure that they are ready for business. Now, Colonel Gerard, with your permission we will resume our game of écarté."

It is one of those occasions which one does not forget. This captain, who was a man of iron, shuffled and cut, dealt and played as if he were in his café. From below we heard the inarticulate murmurings of the two mates, half smothered by the handkerchiefs which gagged them. Outside the timbers creaked and the sails hummed under the brisk breeze which was sweeping us upon our way. Amid the splash of the waves and the whistle of the wind we heard the wild cheers and shoutings of the English sailors as they broached the keg of rum. We played half a dozen games, and then the captain rose. "I think they are ready for us now," said he. He took a brace of pistols from a locker, and he handed one of them to me.

But we had no need to fear resistance, for there was no one to resist. The Englishman of those days, whether soldier or sailor, was an incorrigible drunkard. Without drink he was a brave and good man. But if drink were laid before him it was a perfect madness—nothing could induce him to take it with moderation. In the dim light of the den which they inhabited, five senseless figures and two shouting, swearing, singing madmen represented

the crew of the *Black Swan*. Coils of rope were brought forward by the steward, and with the help of two French seamen (the third was at the wheel) we secured the drunkards and tied them up, so that it was impossible for them to speak or move. They were placed under the forehatch, as their officers had been under the after one, and Kerouan was directed twice a day to give them food and drink. So at last we found that the *Black Swan* was entirely our own.

Had there been bad weather I do not know what we should have done, but we still went gaily upon our way with a wind which was strong enough to drive us swiftly south, but not strong enough to cause us alarm. On the evening of the third day I found Captain Fourneau gazing eagerly out from the platform in the front of the vessel. "' Look, Gerard, look ! " he cried and pointed over the pole which struck out in front.

A light blue sky rose from a dark blue sea, and far away, at the point where they met, was a shadowy something like a cloud, but more definite in shape.

" What is it ? " I cried.

" It is land."

" And what land ? "

I strained my ears for the answer, and yet I knew already what the answer would be.

" It is St. Helena."

Here, then, was the island of my dreams ! Here was the cage where our great Eagle of France was confined ! All those thousands of leagues of water had not sufficed to keep Gerard from the master whom he loved. There he was, there on that cloud-bank yonder over the dark blue sea. How my eyes devoured it ! How my soul flew in front of the vessel—flew on and on to tell him that he was not forgotten, that after many days one faithful servant was coming to his side ! Every instant the dark blur upon the water grew harder and clearer. Soon I could see plainly enough that it was indeed a mountainous island. The night fell, but still I knelt upon the deck,

with my eyes fixed upon the darkness which covered the spot where I knew that the great Emperor was. An hour passed and another one, and then suddenly a little golden twinkling light shone out exactly ahead of us. It was the light of the window of some house—perhaps of his house. It could not be more than a mile or two away. Oh, how I held out my hands to it !—they were the hands of Étienne Gerard, but it was for all France that they were held out.

Every light had been extinguished aboard our ship, and presently, at the direction of Captain Fourneau, we all pulled upon one of the ropes, which had the effect of swinging round one of the sticks above us, and so stopping the vessel. Then he asked me to step down to the cabin.

"You understand everything now, Colonel Gerard," said he, "and you will forgive me if I did not take you into my complete confidence before. In a matter of such importance I make no man my confidant. I have long planned the rescue of the Emperor, and my remaining in England and joining their merchant service was entirely with that design. All has worked out exactly as I expected. I have made several successful voyages to the West Coast of Africa, so that there was no difficulty in my obtaining the command of this one. One by one I got these old French man-of-war's-men among the hands. As to you, I was anxious to have one tried fighting man in case of resistance, and I also desired to have a fitting companion for the Emperor during his long homeward voyage. My cabin is already fitted up for his use. I trust that before to-morrow morning he will be inside it, and we out of sight of this accursed island."

You can think of my emotion, my friends, as I listened to these words. I embraced the brave Fourneau, and implored him to tell me how I could assist him.

"I must leave it all in your hands," said he. "Would that I could have been the first to pay him homage, but it would not be wise for me to go. The glass is falling, there is a storm brewing, and we have the land under our

lee. Besides, there are three English cruisers near the island which may be upon us at any moment. It is for me, therefore, to guard the ship and for you to bring off the Emperor."

I thrilled at the words.

"Give me your instructions!" I cried.

"I can only spare you one man, for already I can hardly pull round the yards," said he. "One of the boats has been lowered, and this man will row you ashore and await your return, The light which you see is indeed the light of Longwood. All who are in the house are your friends, and all may be depended upon to aid the Emperor's escape. There is a cordon of English sentries, but they are not very near to the house. Once you have got as far as that you will convey our plans to the Emperor, guide him down to the boat, and bring him on board."

The Emperor himself could not have given his instructions more shortly and clearly. There was not a moment to be lost. The boat with the seaman was waiting alongside. I stepped into it, and an instant afterwards we had pushed off. Our little boat danced over the dark waters, but always shining before my eyes was the light of Longwood, the light of the Emperor, the star of hope. Presently the bottom of the boat grated upon the pebbles of the beach. It was a deserted cove, and no challenge from a sentry came to disturb us. I left the seaman by the boat and began to climb the hill-side.

There was a goat-track winding in and out among the rocks, so I had no difficulty in finding my way. It stands to reason that all paths in St. Helena would lead to the Emperor. I came to a gate. No sentry—and I passed through. Another gate—still no sentry! I wondered what had become of this cordon of which Fourneau had spoken. I had come now to the top of my climb, for there was the light burning steadily right in front of me. I concealed myself and took a good look round, but still I could see no sign of the enemy. As I approached I

saw the house, a long, low building with a veranda. A man was walking up and down upon the path in front. I crept nearer and had a look at him. Perhaps it was this cursed Hudson Lowe. What a triumph if I could not only rescue the Emperor, but also avenge him ! But it was more likely that this man was an English sentry. I crept nearer still, and the man stopped in front of the lighted window, so that I could see him. No ; it was no soldier, but a priest. I wondered what such a man could be doing there at two in the morning. Was he French or English ? If he were one of the household I might take him into my confidence. If he were English he might ruin all my plans. I crept a little nearer still, and at that moment he entered the house, a flood of light pouring out through the open door. All was clear for me now, and I understood that not an instant was to be lost. Bending myself double I ran swiftly forward to the lighted window. Raising my head I peeped through, and there was the Emperor lying dead before me !

My friends, I fell down upon the gravel walk as senseless as if a bullet had passed through my brain. So great was the shock that I wonder that I survived it. And yet in half an hour I had staggered to my feet again, shivering in every limb, my teeth chattering, and there I stood staring with the eyes of a maniac into that room of death.

He lay upon a bier in the centre of the chamber, calm, composed, majestic, his face full of that reserve power which lightened our hearts upon the day of battle. A half-smile was fixed upon his pale lips, and his eyes, half-opened, seemed to be turned on mine. He was stouter than when I had seen him at Waterloo, and there was a gentleness of expression which I had never seen in life. On either side of him burned rows of candles, and this was the beacon which had welcomed us at sea, which had guided me over the water, and which I had hailed as my star of hope. Dimly I became conscious that many people were kneeling in the room ; the little Court, men and women, who had shared his fortunes, Bert-

rand, his wife, the priest, Montholon—all were there. I would have prayed too, but my heart was too heavy and bitter for prayer. And yet I must leave, and I could not leave him without a sign. Regardless of whether I was seen or not, I drew myself erect before my dead leader, brought my heels together, and raised my hand in a last salute. Then I turned and hurried off through the darkness, with the picture of the wan, smiling lips and the steady grey eyes dancing always before me.

It had seemed to me but a little time that I had been away, and yet the boatman told me that it was hours. Only when he spoke of it did I observe that the wind was blowing half a gale from the sea and that the waves were roaring in upon the beach. Twice we tried to push out our little boat, and twice it was thrown back by the sea. The third time a great wave filled it and stove the bottom. Helplessly we waited beside it until the dawn broke, to show a raging sea and a flying scud above it. There was no sign of the *Black Swan*. Climbing the hill we looked down, but on all the great torn expanse of the ocean there was no gleam of a sail. She was gone. Whether she had sunk, or whether she was recaptured by her English crew, or what strange fate may have been in store for her, I do not know. Never again in this life did I see Captain Fourneau to tell him the result of my mission. For my own part I gave myself up to the English, my boatman and I pretending that we were the only survivors of a lost vessel—though, indeed, there was no pretence in the matter. At the hands of their officers I received that generous hospitality which I have always encountered, but it was many a long month before I could get a passage back to the dear land outside of which there can be no happiness for so true a Frenchman as myself.

And so I tell you in one evening how I bade good-bye to my master, and I take my leave also of you, my kind friends, who have listened so patiently to the long-winded stories of an old broken soldier. Russia, Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal and England, you have gone with me to

all these countries, and you have seen through my dim eyes something of the sparkle and splendour of those great days, and I have brought back to you some shadow of those men whose tread shook the earth. Treasure it in your minds and pass it on to your children, for the memory of a great age is the most precious treasure that a nation can possess. As the tree is nurtured by its own cast leaves, so it is these dead men and vanished days which may bring out another blossoming of heroes, of rulers, and of sages. I go to Gascony, but my words stay here in your memory, and long after Étienne Gerard is forgotten a heart may be wàrmed or a spirit braced by some faint echo of the words that he has spoken. Gentlemen, an old soldier salutes you and bids you farewell.

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